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THE TRAVELLER'S JOY.

THE TRAVELLER'S JOY

BY

ERNEST FREDERIC PIERCE

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
31 WEST TWENTY-THIRD STREET
1907

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To "Joy."

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THE TRAVELLER'S JOY.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH TELLS OF A CERTAIN INN CALLED "THE TRAVELLER'S JOY."

SHOULD you have occasion to journey southward to the little coast town of Hillingsea and should be belated ere your road winds up the downs, look out for the sign of "The Traveller's Joy," and spend the night thereat. If you sleep soundly—and you should do between such sweet white linen—you will waken in the morning with an odd feeling that in some strange way the world has been new-made while you were sleeping; for the sun never shines more gaily than in that latticed window looking out over the garden, nor could birds sing more joyously than those who help to make summer in that country of woods and hills. And if you sleep but lightly, what matter? In the green May-month you will stir to hear the nightingale in

the copse, singing, with all the rapture of mating-time throbbing in his throat; till you catch your breath for very wonder, while all about you in the room there is a glimmer of white dimity and starlight.

Or should your passing be at the noontide, then stay and rest awhile in the cool parlour, and mine host will bring you fruit from the garden. You may dine like a monk at a festival, if simplicity be your aim; and for a drink—well, William Hodges makes his own cider, and he is proud to tell you there is none better.

But if you wish to keep summer in manner inimitable, go to that wild south country where the region of oak and pine, birch and bracken, sandstone and scattered commons, breaks into sunny meadows and rich pastures just under the South Downs, and seek there that sign which looks both ways of the road. Then stay at that inn of good omen all the summer long, and I shall wonder if you do not desire to stay all the winter too.

Was there ever a name more suitable for such an inn? Set back from the road, between a thicket of lilac on one side and a tangled hedgerow on the other, with its stone roof, mended at one end with red tiles, all yellow-gold with lichen, it looked out

from its orchard as though content to let the heavier and the mercenary traffic of the road pass it by unheeded. But for the artist, the traveller, or for any who were way-weary, its bright windows seemed to smile a welcome, which made the quaint sign swinging at the roadside hardly needful. Inside it was a traveller's joy indeed; from the old oak settle which filled an honoured place at the side of the chimney-corner in the kitchen to the cool bedroom with its big wooden bed; from the clean array of pewter behind the bar to the linen press which stood at the head of the stairs.

Had the inn been more imposing William Hodges might have been prouder of it, though that is doubtful; but he certainly could not have loved it half as much as he did in its simple, cheery homeliness. It was the only home he had ever known, for he had followed both his father and his grandfather as innkeeper. His wife was a bright little woman, absurdly small one would think to be mated with so big a fellow; but she was an excellent home-keeper, and managed her household well, and, incidentally, managed William too, for all his seventy-three inches. He was large limbed and fair, ruddy of face through the sun and the wind, somewhat stolid

in manner as becomes a man of his inches, and with a deep, gruff voice that he used but seldom, unless there were good reason for speech.

Now trade at "The Traveller's Joy" was not very large. The inn was off the main road northward from Hillingsea, and lay on the road that took one to the village of Wainford, three miles farther on. Being still a "free" house, the refreshment provided thereat was of unquestioned quality. I have heard some of William's more regular customers openly scorn the idea that as good ale could be got at Wainford, where the four inns which betokened the capacity of Wainford's thirst were all "tied" houses. So "The Traveller's Joy" earned a certain small renown, but it was too far from anywhere in particular to be easily spoiled thereby.

Hillingsea, however, filled a large place in the mind of William. It was "the town," to which a wayfarer was always supposed to be journeying if he passed towards the hills; and if one should chance to come the other way, then it was "from the town" sure enough. Nor was this without reason. Apart from being the nearest town of its size, Hillingsea, as its name implied, had the distinction of being set by the sea itself; and William loved the sea. He

loved the inn because it was familiar—he knew every corner of it, it had been his home for so long that it seemed almost part of himself; but the sea he loved as one who would love something unfamiliar, yet thought of, and cared for, and desired. Perhaps something of the salt sea restlessness inherited of his grandsire, who had been a sailor before he had settled to inn-keeping, had given William in his younger days the desire for a sailor's life. But his lot was to follow his father at the inn, and though after awhile he forgot his wish to become a sailor, he never lost his love of the sea. So a stranger coming from the town was doubly welcome, and should it chance that their talk turned upon the inn, William would never fail to remind the other that it was only "ten miles from the sea as the crow flies. It was a refrain that rarely failed. "Ten miles from the sea as the crow flies" was the highest recommendation for "The Traveller's Joy" that William could offer.

CHAPTER II.

WHICH TELLS HOW A CERTAIN TRAVELLER CAME TO THE INN.

THE kitchen at "The Traveller's Joy" was a large, cool room, with long, deep-set windows looking out upon the road and to the meadows beyond, which at this time were hazy under the sun; for the afternoon of the last day of May was wearing towards five o'clock, and the sunshine was warm about the fields. A little breeze crept through the open door, bringing a soft freshness into the kitchen, and mingling some of the garden sweetness with the homely smell of clean linen. Yet Mrs. Hodges was somewhat hot, for ironing is anything but a cool business on a sunny afternoon. And evidently someone else was hot too, judging by the way he dropped his knapsack and mopped his forehead while preparing to mount the gate on the other side of the road. Hearing footsteps stop outside, Mrs. Hodges looked up from her ironing just in time to see the stranger make himself as comfortable as a

three-inch bar of oak will allow. Apparently he was surveying the inn with a good deal of satisfaction.

Travellers were fewer than usual that day, and the ironing was almost finished, so Mrs. Hodges must be pardoned if she idled for a minute to make closer observation; and certainly there was an unusual air of satisfaction about the stranger that made him worthy of observation. Tall and lithe and clean of limb, he looked a picture of lazy vigour. He was clad in a brown Norfolk suit, with a white shirt of some soft material, open at the throat. His cap was lying on the ground, and the breeze ruffled his short, dark, curly hair. Evidently the sun and he were well acquainted, for his face was brown, and he had that trick of smiling which they who love the sun are wont to have.

"I shouldn't wonder if he wants to stay here," commented Mrs. Hodges to herself. "Will!" she called aloud, hearing her husband moving in the garden.

William came obediently; the diminutive seemed almost absurd for so ample a man.

"See this young fellow on the gate," she said; 'he looks as if he might want to stay here."

It looked rather as if he meant to stay where he was, if one might judge by his comfortable expression.

"Come from the town," said William, with a nod.

"A traveller, at any rate," replied his wife, noting the knapsack and the keen brown face; "he looks like a foreigner."

"An artist," ventured William, seeing possibilities of a guest; and in this William was both right and wrong.

Artist to him had but one meaning: a painter of pictures. Now Anthony Lane Penrose, the stranger upon the gate, could not paint a picture for the life of him; so William was wrong on that point. But artist Mr. Penrose certainly was; at least, so two of his critics agreed when reviewing a certain little volume of his; and when the critics *do* agree, who shall dare to disagree? He was the author of three or four graceful volumes, one of which at least had brought him a measure of fame, greatly to his surprise. His work had that elusive quality we name style, and perhaps he was known not so much for what he had accomplished, as for the promise therein of richer things to come.

So William was right when he called him an artist.

Meanwhile Mr. Penrose had apparently arrived at some momentous conclusion.

"Hanged if I won't try!" he ejaculated, springing off the gate (surely a somewhat colloquial expression for one who was accounted a stylist).

That this remark referred to "The Traveller's Joy" was evident, for he gathered up his stick and his knapsack and strode across the road to the inn.

William—it was surprising how that man could move when necessary—was at the door ere Mr. Penrose was well over the road, with a gruff "Good afternoon, sir!"

"Good afternoon," responded Anthony. "Warm, isn't it?"

"Hot, I should say," quoth William.

Anthony laughed, such a merry boyish laugh, for all his twenty-six years and his literary fame.

"You have a jolly place here," he said.

"Aye, sir, and only ten miles from the sea as the crow flies!"

"Only ten miles!" Anthony's tone was not one of conviction. "I should have said thirty at least."

He measured the distance by his appetite—never a safe gauge for any man of vigour.

By this time he was within the bar, looking with admiration on the kindly homeliness of it all.

"Ah, this is good," he exclaimed, "after one has tramped 'ten miles as the crow flies' and lunched on top of the hills."

"You be come from the town?" queried William, with assurance in his voice.

"Yes, I have come from Hillingsea, if that is the town you mean." Anthony had yet to learn that to the host of "The Traveller's Joy" there was only one town. "I left there before eight o'clock, and had a rare morning across the downs."

"Like something to drink, sir?" suggested William sympathetically.

"Thank you, I would," replied Anthony, heartily.

"Then step into the parlour, will you, sir?"

Turning, William led the way along the short passage to the right, behind the bar, and so into the parlour. What a big, homely old place it was, so sweet and light with the long windows set wide open! Anthony looked out at the end farthest from the road, through which the breeze entered with the full fragance of early summer. Creepers hung about his head, and the promise of roses. Over a corner of the garden he caught a glimpse of a stretch of

common, where the gold of the furze still glowed between patches of dark heather. He took a long breath, as though he would be filled with such earth-sweetness. He crossed the room to see out at the other end. The window was low, and he rested his arms upon the wide sill and stood with his head thrust out into the sunlight. Beyond the road and the green meadows he could see the glorious sweep of hills, set like a rampart between that country and the sea.

Perhaps it was the frank geniality of Anthony's face which prompted William to bring of his best. Indeed, there was something winning about Anthony which most people responded to readily enough, giving of their best ere they were aware of it, as they do who serve instinctively that gift of gracious youth.

"You did not say what you 'ud take, sir, so I 've brought some cider. 'Tis home-made, and there be none better."

William set the pewter mug down with an air of pride.

"I didn't know you brewed cider in this part of the country," said Anthony, after thanking him and returning Mrs. Hodges' greeting. "I stayed for

some months with the good people of Devonshire, and became very fond of their cider."

"Well, sir, not many people about here make it—'tis gone out of fashion," explained Mrs. Hodges; "but, having plenty of cider-fruit, William has a fancy to make his own."

"'Tis as good as any I tasted in Devon," was Anthony's comment when he had drained his cup.

William nodded and looked pleased; his opinion of Anthony was at that moment a very high one.

"You are a stranger in these parts, I suppose, sir?" Mrs. Hodges ventured. She had been quietly taking stock of Anthony, and that young gentleman might have felt rather flattered could he have known her mental summing up of his personality.

"Yes," he replied, "I have never been this way before. I am taking a holiday on the road and exploring a little. I am very fond of the country."

"Where are you bound for now?" she inquired.

"Well, I really do not know. I just follow my fancy. . . . And that reminds me, I did not come only to find something to drink, but to ask if you could put me up. My fancy at present is to stay here the night, perhaps longer." William's face betrayed nothing, but his wife's eyes met his own

with a very comprehensive look. "Directly I saw the inn I thought it was the very place for me; that sign of yours proved most enticing. After I had sat on the gate for a minute or two I screwed up courage to come and see inside."

Now that was not strictly true, for Anthony's courage rarely required much screwing up; and had mine host offered any opposition Anthony would have beguiled him, by hook or by crook, to get his own way. But that glance of mutual understanding had evidently satisfied William.

"Well, sir, there's a room all ready you may have if you like." He paused. William's pause was sometimes more eloquent than his words; this one seemed charged with suppressed humour. Then they all three laughed. "It do seem a bit odd, you wanting to stay here all in a hurry like," continued William.

"Perhaps you would like to go upstairs and see the room, sir?" added his wife practically.

"Thank you, I would."

William now dropped into the background. That region of "upstairs" was beyond the boundary of his domain; there Mrs. Hodges was supreme, as every good housewife should be. She now took the

lead up the quaint winding stairs, from the lowest of which one could see both the kitchen and the parlour, as well as the door. They were ample stairs, broad and easy of going, with a distinct country charm, as though their builder had never been in a hurry. There was an atmosphere about them, a quality that is common to such out-of-date things as sun-bonnets and smocks and homely old china. At the top Mrs. Hodges opened a door directly opposite.

"There, sir, I hope you will like this room," she said, ushering him into a cool white chamber.

"I shall want to stay here a month," said Anthony, "if this is to be my bedroom."

It was over the parlour, and nearly of the same size. But this room had a window looking southward straight to the splendid line of the hills, and another set in the slope of the roof facing eastward.

"'Tis a nice comfortable room, sir," said Mrs. Hodges, giving the bed a touch here and there, as though to assure herself that it was well made.

"I should think it is," agreed Anthony. He looked out from the window in the roof. "And what a view!" he exclaimed. "I do like a bedroom with a window towards the sunrise, so that

the sun may waken me in the morning; it seems to start the day well."

"Would you like a wash?" Mrs. Hodges asked.

"Yes, thanks, I should," replied Anthony.

"Then I'll fetch some water, sir."

Anthony took off his coat to prepare for the arrival of the water, then he made a closer inspection of the room. There was not much in it beside the bed, the washstand, a clothes-press, and a couple of rush-bottom chairs. The bed was a large item, big enough for three people, with a great array of white canopy over the head of it. The walls were whitewashed, with the oak beams, dark and shining with age, left unspoiled.

A tap at the door, and a pair of shy, inquisitive eyes were lifted to Anthony's.

"Please, I've brought the water," piped a small voice; the little maid was about nine years of age, and evidently the daughter of William, for she had his eyes and his colour and his shy manner.

"Thank you," said Anthony, taking the jug from her; already the shyness began to vanish into smiles. This light-hearted Anthony had a great fondness for children; and I doubt if there be

any true earth-lover but has, lurking somewhere in his heart, a very real affection for the little ones, with their spontaneous laughter and merry ways of childhood, or, looking into their appealing eyes, wishes that they might never know regret.

Anthony had a glorious wash. If you wish to get the greatest amount of pleasure out of a basin of water walk over those southern hills on a sunny day when the air comes hot off the turf, then come home all moist and rosy, and splash to your heart's content in a cool room, with the prospect of a pleasant meal before you. And if a pretty face or a rosy mouth bring the water for your ablution, I for one am with you if you thank the gods that you are made a man with an eye for such.

"I have laid the cloth in the parlour," was the welcome greeting from Mrs. Hodges when Anthony went downstairs. "What would you like for supper, sir—any meat?"

"No, thanks, a couple of eggs, and anything else you care to bring me."

As anticipated, this arrangement proved most satisfactory from Anthony's point of view. Very

young lettuce fresh from the garden, sweet home-made bread, and a cake of yesterday's baking graced the table, to say nothing of honey and jam. Truly that good lady had excellent judgment in furnishing a repast for a hungry traveller.

"Thank you, Mrs.——"

Anthony paused, smiling a question.

"Hodges," said the other. "And what is your name, may I ask, sir?'

Another pause.

Penrose was not an unknown name now in the literary world. And where Anthony had last kept holiday it had been noised abroad in some inexplicable way that Mr. Anthony Lane Penrose was staying there, much to that young gentleman's annoyance. Indeed, he was ungallant enough to wonder if they who had read his books were all objectionable people; and he had then resolved to drop the "Penrose" another time lest another landlady should make a royalty out of him. He now acted upon that resolve, little thinking into what a tangle it might involve him.

"My name is Lane, Mrs. Hodges," he said, "Anthony Lane."

"Thank you, sir. We always like to know the

gentlemen who stay here. The last one who had your room was an artist, and he was here for six weeks. I hope you will want to stay here for several days," she added.

Anthony laughed.

"Thank you, I think I shall want to," he returned, prophetically as it would seem in the light of subsequent events.

CHAPTER III.

WHICH TELLS HOW OUR TRAVELLER WOKE ON THE NEXT MORNING, AND HOW A STORM BROUGHT TWO OTHER TRAVELLERS TO THE INN.

THE next morning Anthony opened his eyes amid the glory of a fiery summer sunrise. He had gone to bed while yet the twilight dimly lit the room, and had slept the unbroken sleep of the unfamed; so half-past three and the full-throated chorus of birds found him stirring. For awhile he lay half dozing; the splendour of the sky dazed him, and the song of the birds seemed borne from the threshold of the land of sleep. Then a blackbird beneath the window took up the dawn theme and piped to a waking world, and Anthony sprang out of bed wide awake too.

The sun was nearly up. Great broad wings of rose and saffron spread from crimson bars of cloud, and between them the sky was pale, clear emerald, with strange half-tints of amethyst. Above there floated daintiest clouds like apple blossom blown

grey as it fell. Anthony let the light fill his eyes; he opened his arms as though he would take in the whole of that glory with one deep breath.

Then the sun came, a ball of fire from behind the pines. Anthony still watched.

"No wonder the birds sing at morn," he thought, "they *must*." Then there came into his mind a vision of the early world, when not only the day was newborn, but the very earth itself; and he fancied that then men must have been as the gods, holding unbroken the power of perfect song, and jubilant, even as the birds, at the unspoiled day.

Anthony was not the only one astir early, for before he had finished his dressing he heard someone go downstairs.

"Mine host," he thought, not mistaking the solidity of that tread, for truly Hodges was a host in himself. Shortly he heard footsteps in the garden, so he put his head out of the window, and with a blythe "good morning," shouted rather than said, he greeted Hodges.

"Good mornin'! You're up early, sir," responded the other, wondering to see his guest up at that hour.

"Couldn't lay abed a morning like this."

Hodges laughed.

"Wait till 'tis wet," he said.

Anthony found his way down into the garden, where William was already busy.

"You have a large garden, Mr. Hodges," he said.

"Aye, sir, 'tis as much as I can manage."

"So I should think. You grow a lot of things."

"Aye, pretty nigh everything that will grow, in turn."

"The apple blossom promises well," went on Anthony.

William grunted assent.

"It has got nicely set," he said, "and a good thing, too; there be thunder coming afore night."

"Do you think so?" asked Anthony.

"I'm sure of it. There was thunder in that sunrise, and ther' bäint hardly any dew"—this with the air of one who had watched the face of the sky to some purpose. And so it proved; for ere midday was past, little fleecy tufts of white cloud came creeping up against the wind, and silently the day changed and the sunlight grew wan.

Meanwhile Anthony explored the delights of the garden, finding, as he expected, that mine host improved upon further acquaintance. As to William, he began to develop quite unthought-of powers of conversation.

"Have you often taken a long walk for a holiday?" he queried, straightening his back for a moment after stooping over a strawberry bed.

"Yes, I have been on the tramp several times. But the day's walk is not always a long one—sometimes it might be nearly thirty miles, sometimes hardly ten. I follow my fancy, and Fancy is a fickle jade to follow. Then if I feel inclined to stay awhile at any place, I stay—until a desire for further wandering seizes me. And so I spend my summers."

"And a very nice way of spending them, too," put in William, nodding his head with nearly every word.

"You 're right," said Anthony. "This year I thought I would explore this out-of-the-way region—and here I am."

"Aye, sir, here you are, and I hope you 'll not want to go further for a few days. There 's wilder country further inland for certain, but this is just

the place for anyone fond o' the country, who can use their legs a bit, maybe. Why, there's the hills, and Marple Down, and Woodgate Common, and Wainford, and the river—though that bäint o' much consequence—and High-Pine-Furlong, and"—here William paused to gather effect, it was a tremendous speech for him—"and only ten miles from the sea as the crow flies," he finished triumphantly, drawing his hand across his brow.

"That sounds very promising," laughed Anthony. "I shall want a week at least. After breakfast I should like to go to those pine trees I can see from my bedroom window."

"That's High-Pine-Furlong," began William, but before he could say more a voice came from between the currant bushes—

"Daddie! Daddie!" It was the early morning sweetness of five years old.

William turned, as a little rosy-faced elf emerged, open armed.

"Dood morning, daddie!"

What daddie might have answered was smothered in kisses. Evidently this little maid—the image of her mother, as William would say—was her father's darling.

"Well, little one, have you got a kiss for me too?" asked Anthony, when William had released himself from the two chubby arms which held him.

She eyed him for a moment, then very promptly were the rosy lips put up for him to take his caress.

"What's your name?" he questioned.

"Winnie; but daddie calls me 'Chicken' sometimes."

"What's yours?" she added.

There was a moment's pause.

"Uncle Tony," Anthony replied.

"Anover uncle, daddie," she said, clapping her hands.

"Will you play with me?" she asked Anthony

Of course he would.

"Lift me up then," she demanded.

He lifted her and sat her in the apple tree among the blossom, then romped with her, and played hide-and-seek, until between them they made the old garden ring with their laughter, and Nellie came with welcome tidings of breakfast.

Nell ran less than Winnie did, and she would walk where the other would romp along; nor had

Winnie that shy look which Anthony noticed in Nell's eyes when she brought the water upstairs to him the previous evening. Perhaps where Winnie demanded love Nell would give it, and you felt that at nine years she was older than Winnie would ever be at that age.

"It's breakfast-time, Daddie," she said.

"Well, I'm ready for it," William replied, "'ain't you, Mr. Lane?"

Anthony assented readily enough, and they went in together, William first, with Winnie dragging "Uncle Tony," not unwillingly, and Nell bringing up the rear.

Some hours later Anthony returned to the inn from a round of exploration. Following William's directions, he had promptly lost himself, as far as it was possible to lose oneself with such prominent landmarks as Marple Down and High-Pine-Furlong. At length, finding himself at the pines, he spent a lazy hour or two in the splendid stillness, until the green twilight grew gloomy, and he remembered William's warning that there was thunder about. Before he reached the inn the storm was already muttering in the distance, and a brooding breathlessness hung in the air.

Soon after he was safely indoors the rain began, sparingly, in big, pattering drops. The storm was working along the edge of the downs, and westward the whole landscape was swallowed up in a white fury, rent and whirled every few seconds by the lightning.

Anthony looked out from his bedroom towards the hills. They loomed up weird and majestic in the purple gloom of the storm, and behind them the sky smouldered with a deep orange light from somewhere over the sea.

About a mile away the road ran open for a space, and he saw a small trap coming rapidly in the direction of the inn.

"They will drive right into the thick of it," he commented, seeing Destiny draw near, but not knowing it in so homely a guise.

"There's a trap coming down the road," he told Mrs. Hodges, meeting her at the foot of the stairs. Mrs. Hodges passed the tidings on to William.

"That's Miss Weston, I'll be bound," said William. "She went past to the town this morning. I told her a storm was brewing, but she only laughed."

Now having profited by William's advice, and got in safely from the weather, Anthony felt very virtuous, and he summed up Miss Weston accordingly.

"One of those strong-minded females, who always know better than anybody else," he thought; implying that if Miss Weston did receive a drenching it was no more than she deserved.

The strong-minded female was for him incarnate in the person of a very austere aunt, whose mental outlook was bounded by the Dead Sea of Conservative politics on the one hand and the Jordan of parochial charity on the other, and whose favourite text was the depravity of mankind in general and of literary mankind in particular. So that when William opened the door in apparent expectation, and at the same time the storm began overhead in deadly earnest, Anthony painfully imagined the possibility of being weather-bound for several hours with some such person. She might be very severe, and occupy the most comfortable chair in the parlour, holding him at arm's length until the frigid atmosphere brought on a kindly stupor; or, worse still, she might be very friendly, and try to pass the time in heart-stirring conversation on Church law,

and perhaps try to gauge the soundness of his views upon various moral and economic questions. Anthony's pagan soul groaned within him at such an appalling prospect, and he contemplated immediate retreat to his bedroom. But while he hesitated the sound of wheels drew near and stopped just outside the door, and his retreat was cut off.

"Quick, Miss Weston, come in," he heard William say. "I'll put Sam in."

Then came a rush of feet and a merry laugh amid the noise of thunder and beating rain; and a bright voice, "Oh, Mr. Hodges, we are caught nicely!"

Anthony pricked up his ears at the sound of that voice. It was gay and ringing, full of buoyant life; a girlish voice, pitched neither high nor low, that suggested a pair of shining, laughing eyes, and a heart that would never fail one. From his stronghold in the parlour Anthony immediately went over to the enemy.

"That's no strong-minded female," he said to himself, chuckling at his dismal fears, which were already dispelled by the sound of a girl's voice. "My son, you are in luck's way."

A hasty consultation was being held on the threshold of the kitchen.

"You can't go on home in a storm like this," said Mrs. Hodges, "and you *must* change your wet clothes."

Miss Weston laughed.

"It would be better to change, we are rather wet; but what are we to wear instead?"

"Well, miss, if you don't mind, I'll lend you some things to put on."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hodges, I am sure we shall not mind. What do you say, Amy?"

Anthony wondered who Amy was.

"There's no one to see us," she replied.

"A truly feminine view of the situation," thought Anthony.

"Come along then, miss," said Mrs. Hodges, leading the way upstairs, "we'll soon get you dry."

"I've a gentleman staying here for a day or two," she vouchsafed as they passed Anthony's bedroom.

"A gentleman!" chorused both the girls.

"Yes, miss, a young gentleman."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Amy, thinking of the figure she would cut in Mrs. Hodges' garments.

Miss Weston laughed.

"Never mind, dear, Mrs. Hodges will lend you an apron, then you will look fascinating enough. Besides, if we go into the kitchen he won't so much as catch sight of us."

Meanwhile Anthony, in a strange state of excitement, was wondering what manner of person the owner of that voice might be. He tried to picture her—would she be dark or fair, tall or short? Dark, he fancied, probably because he preferred dark women to fair ones; not very old certainly, and not very tall, with such a ripple of fun in her voice. Clearly it would not be Master Anthony's fault if he did not soon catch sight of *her*.

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH TELLS OF A MERRY EVENING SPENT AT "THE TRAVELLER'S JOY."

NOW Anthony was much exercised in his mind as to whether the two girls would come to the parlour or make their way into the kitchen. Had they been simply weather-bound travellers they would have come to the parlour as a matter of course; but they were evidently well acquainted with Mrs. Hodges, and he thought it was not unlikely that they would go into the kitchen, especially as there were garments to be dried; from which it will be gathered that he thought about the possible doings of Miss Weston—the other did not count—a great deal more than would be expected after so short an acquaintance with Miss Weston's voice.

Littérateur that he was, Anthony was also a man of action when occasion demanded. Having decided that she would most likely come down to the kitchen, he took the initiative and went there himself, to await events from that point of vantage.

"Hullo, Uncle Tony!" was the greeting he received from Winnie, who was curled up in a corner near the fire.

"Hullo, little one, afraid of the thunder then?"

She put her hand in his.

"Not 'zackly afraid, 'cos daddy's here—and you, but——" there was a pause.

"But what, little one?"

"I wish it wouldn't make such a big noise."

"Oh, is that it?" Anthony said, seating himself and lifting her on to his knee.

"Do you often get so heavy a storm as this, Mr. Hodges?" he asked.

"No, sir; they mostly go up the river above Wainford."

"Those two young ladies must have got soaked," Anthony continued, thinking that the process of drying was being unduly prolonged.

"Aye, they were wet," replied William, "and if it doan't stop rainin' I doan't see how they are to get home to-night."

"Oh!" Anthony saw possibilities of a long evening's enjoyment.

"You see, sir, there's no telling when a thunder rain like this will stop," went on William. "It

comes up sudden, and sometimes it goes away sudden, but sometimes it doan't."

"Does Miss Weston live far from here?" queried Anthony.

"A good four miles by the roäd," said the other.

Here Anthony, who had been listening the while, but had heard little besides the roll and rattle of the thunder and the hiss of the rain, caught the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and Mrs. Hodges' voice saying, "I'll just carry your wet things into the kitchen, miss."

"We will come too, Mrs. Hodges, if we may," replied Miss Weston; and as they entered the kitchen Anthony smiled to himself.

He rose to his feet as Winnie slipped off his knee to go to give Miss Weston a hug. So this was his lady of the merry voice, this bonnie-faced girl with laughing eyes, and dark wavy hair that went its own sweet way over her brow.

"Good afternoon," she said, looking from Winnie to Anthony in a frank way. "We are weather-bound, you see."

There was quite an immoderate degree of pleasure in his voice as he responded to her greeting.

"I am afraid you got rather wet," he said. He

could not truthfully add that he was sorry for it; indeed, he was rather inclined to heap blessings upon the weather.

"Good afternoon," said Miss Weston's friend, whose name was Amy Warren, and whose personality afforded a marked contrast to the other. Apparently she was of the town, and for that reason a little less cordial in her greeting than Miss Weston, a little inclined to dignity.

"We are in borrowed plumes," laughed Miss Weston, as Mrs. Hodges began to arrange their damp frocks before the fire, "and 'motley's the only wear'."

"H'm, Shakespeare, and aptly quoted," thought Anthony.

Miss Weston was wearing a striped petticoat of Mrs. Hodges', that hung well above her ankles, and a gay-coloured blouse. Anthony thought it became her well, noting her eager face and sparkling eyes, the clean curve of her throat and her tilted chin. Clearly this was an out-of-doors girl, for the sun had kissed her cheeks ruddy and brown at once, and had left its gold in the brown of her hair; and her lips—ah, her lips!—were full red with the generous life of her. Altogether there was

something wholesome about her, something sweet and womanly that would respond to a man's most treasured thought. She was like a plant that had grown strong and beautiful in the sun and the wind.

Anthony hoped it would rain all the evening, to prevent them making their way home. He wanted to know more of this girl, whose voice had thrilled him before he saw her face. And now that he had seen her, now that she had spoken to him in that easy manner of good fellowship, he felt sure she was worth knowing.

Although he had no intention of spending a lonely evening in his room if he could help it, he thought that perhaps his presence in the kitchen might be considered an intrusion under the circumstances.

"I think I had better go back to my own quarters," he said, half by way of apology.

"No, don't you go!" said Winnie, running to him and holding him back by the hand; "I want you to stay here wiv me, Uncle Tony."

"Sit down!" she added peremptorily.

"What does mother say?" asked Anthony, nothing loth to be pulled, laughing, into a chair,

where Winnie took immediate possession of his knee.

"Well, if Mr. Lane likes to let you bother him, I don't mind," said Mrs. Hodges.

"Do you like me to bover you?" asked Winnie, rubbing her cheek against his shoulder.

"I believe he does," answered Miss Weston for him.

"You are sure I shall not be in the way?" queried Anthony.

"Oh, no, sir!" Mrs. Hodges replied.

Anthony looked at Miss Weston. To his fancy her eyes said "Oh, no!" too.

Meanwhile William was talking to Miss Warren, or, to be exact, he was letting Miss Warren talk to him, since his part of the conversation was strictly monosyllabic. Miss Warren came from Hillingsea, and William was always ready to listen to anyone who had something to say about "the town." Not that he would have exchanged his inn for a whole street of dwellings in the town; but to him "the town" was a very gate of the sea, and a great wonder lay beyond it for this stolid countryman.

"I am going to stay for two or three weeks with Miss Weston," Miss Warren explained.

Miss Weston had seated herself between the window and the settle where Anthony was.

"Yes, Mrs. Hodges," she added, "Uncle Ralph has gone away for a fortnight, so I must have some responsible person to look after me."

William chuckled; evidently he thought the responsibility would have been too much for him.

"I should think Becky is old enough to do that," said Mrs. Hodges.

"Oh, no, indeed! Becky waives all responsibility as far as I am concerned."

Again William chuckled assent.

"Who might Becky be?" asked Anthony, determined not to be left out of the conversation.

Miss Weston turned a laughing face.

"Becky is general manager at home. She manages everything from jam-making to Mr. Becky—otherwise James—excepting myself," she added merrily. "She's a dear old thing."

"Then who does manage you?" said Anthony, thinking how much he would like to try.

"Oh, *I* do," she replied, in a tone that allowed no possibility of doubt.

"Now I think we'll get tea," said Mrs. Hodges. "Dear me, 'tis late," she commented, as the tall old

clock in the corner chimed six in a leisurely fashion. "Come and help mother put the things down, Win."

Anthony went over to the window by Miss Weston. The storm was beginning to pass over, though the rain was still very heavy and the lightning gleamed fitfully.

"I think a storm is splendid," he remarked.

"So do I," replied Miss Weston; "but it seems half wasted if it comes before dark, doesn't it? The lightning is so grand and terrible at night. I remember once watching it over the sea. It seemed to leap right across the water, all blue and rose colour, and set the whole sky and sea suddenly aflame."

Anthony looked down at her upturned face. The knowledge began to grow upon him that it was one of the sunniest faces he had seen; and how her eyes shone with the vivacity of her thought!

"Do you care for the sea?" he asked her.

"Yes, but I love the country more," she replied simply, as though further comment was quite unnecessary.

"I too love the country," he said, and they both felt that they were no longer strangers.

"Uncle Tony going to have supper with us?" chimed Winnie.

Anthony faced round.

"May I?" he said, before Mrs. Hodges had time to reply.

"Do you mind?" he added, to Miss Weston.

"Oh, no! it will be jolly," she answered; "we'll make quite a merry party, Mrs. Hodges."

Mrs. Hodges thought there was not the slightest doubt about it.

Miss Weston turned to Amy.

"Last time we came here together we had tea under the big pear tree. Do you remember, Amy?"

"Yes, I do; it was the day before I went home, and you wanted to make Mr. Hodges pour out tea for us."

Anthony laughed loudly, and William's eyes met his with a knowing twinkle.

"Ah, Mr. Lane, you may laugh," Miss Warren went on. "I think we had better make you pour out tea for us to-night, and see how you will manage it, eh, Mrs. Hodges?"

Mrs. Hodges would not venture an opinion; the situation was getting entirely out of her hands.

Anthony gave a gesture of dissent.

"Oh, you must," said Miss Weston.

Then he gave in and went to wash his hands.

"Is Mr. Lane an artist?" she asked when he had left the room.

"No, miss; leastways, he says he isn't." Mrs. Hodges yet had some doubt upon that point. "He walked over from the town on Tuesday, and seemed to take a great fancy to the place when he saw it, and asked if we could put him up. He may stay a few days."

"Ah, take care, Madge!" Miss Warren held up a warning finger. "I caught him looking at you with far more interest than becomes a stranger."

"Which is bad for him," put in Miss Weston.

"Well, I do not know about that," returned her friend; "he is evidently a gentleman of taste."

A moment later Anthony came back.

"I want to congratulate you on your good taste, Mr. Lane," said Miss Weston.

Amy gasped, and wondered what was coming next.

"In desiring to pour out tea for so charming a pair of fellow-travellers?" he queried.

"No—though that was very nicely turned—in allowing us to make you pour it out."

"You must not give me any credit for that. To quote an old saying: 'Needs must when the angels drive.'"

Miss Weston's head inclined to one side.

"Is that the exact quotation?" she asked.

"It's as near as I can remember it just now," said the unblushing Anthony.

"Now, seriously, Mr. Lane"—Anthony struggled to assume an expression which was intended to be serious, but somehow failed to fit the occasion—"I want to congratulate you on your good taste in having fallen in love with 'The Traveller's Joy.'"

"So! Mrs. Hodges has been telling tales, has she? Who could help falling in love with it, Miss Weston? It is the jolliest old place I have ever stayed in during my rambles."

The superlative was certainly excusable, considering the company.

"It is a dear old place," Miss Weston replied. "I would not mind being landlady myself here."

"You would never get rid of your travellers if yc were," remarked Anthony.

This was so obvious a compliment that Weston ignored it altogether.

"There, miss, I think I had better give up right away," said Mrs. Hodges.

"Now are we all ready for tea?"

There was a chorus of assent, and a minute later Anthony was pouring out tea, protesting that they would make him nervous if they chaffed him so much.

The meal proceeded merrily. Miss Weston was in high mood; a mood, it must be added, that she was rarely out of. Nor was Anthony a mean second. His buoyant nature found ready outlet in the good-tempered fun and banter which continued almost without a break, with William's deep bass monosyllables by way of punctuation.

"Where is Nellie?" asked Miss Weston.

"Oh, she'll be staying at her Aunt Fanny's," returned Mrs. Hodges. "The storm came on just before she would be coming out of school. I needn't worry about her."

"That is a good thing, Mrs. Hodges," said Anthony; "you have a big family to-day."

"I'm not going to worry about them either," laughed Mrs. Hodges.

"That's so, mother," chuckled William; "but I reckon you'd find 'em a pretty handful if y' had 'em for long."

There was a general laugh at that.

"I don't doubt I should. More than I could manage."

"Ah, Madge," said Miss Warren across the table, "I believe you are glad I was caught in the wet."

"I am, dear," Miss Weston responded sweetly. "It is much jollier to have tea here, not knowing when we shall get home, than to have it at home in the orthodox fashion. I abhor orthodoxy."

"That's the person for whom I am to be responsible during the next two weeks," Miss Warren said, shaking her head in a hopelessly wise fashion. "Don't you envy me?" this to Anthony in particular. But Anthony scarcely heeded; he was absorbed in thought; he had heard *her* name for the first time.

"Madge! Madge!" he was saying over to himself, yielding to the charm of that inward music. "Madge"—he stole a covert glance at her face—was just the name for her. He had been wondering what her name might be; he had even got as far as to hope it was not "Mary," a pretty name enough, only it belonged to his aunt, and she held, as it were, a monopoly of it. But "Madge!"

It could not be better. He smiled at the possibilities of such a name; it matched her voice, and held unfathomable depths of laughter.

Without acknowledging the fact, for as yet he had not reached the point where a certain amount of self-analysis is inevitable, he felt that it was good to be in her company, that for the present he desired nothing further than to hear her talk. The winsome brightness of her manner drew out that responsive lightheartedness which Anthony possessed to a large degree. There is a certain femininity, an alluring and indefinable quality of sex about some womenkind, which fails not to call forth the best that is in a man, whether it be his unawakened chivalry or his courage, an unsuspected youthfulness, or tenderness, or even an admirable equability of temper.

So the meal drew pleasurably toward a close; slowly, however, it must be admitted, for no one, and Anthony least of all, was anxious to see it finished. William grew quite talkative—for him. It pleased him to have so much conversation about him; it was different, too, from that to which he was used, when, as it sometimes chanced of an evening, his regular customers came in more than two at a time.

"Well, miss, are you going to put up here for the night?" he asked, when Anthony had replenished the cups for the last time, and there had come a lull among the busy tongues.

"I had forgotten all about that," Miss Weston acknowledged with commendable frankness. "Why did you remind me? I might have left it until it was too late to do otherwise."

Which showed, at least, that Miss Weston was quite happy where she was. But if she had forgotten, Anthony had not. Thrice for certain he had noted gleefully that the rain had not stopped.

"It is still raining," he said, with evident satisfaction in his voice.

"I don't believe you are a bit sorry, Mr. Lane," observed Miss Warren.

"I am not," was the laconic reply.

"Annie has gone home for a couple of days, so there is her bedroom you may have if you like," said Mrs. Hodges, always practical; "I can soon put some clean sheets on it."

Annie, it must be remarked, was a niece of Mrs. Hodges, who helped her aunt chiefly in the domestic work of "The Traveller's Joy," though occasionally she practised at the bar.

"Oh, dear, there's a temptation!" sighed Miss Weston. "I think we *must* stay the night, Amy."

William went out to serve a customer who had entered the bar, a sign that the rain was lessening.

"'Twas Will Marchant," he said, returning after a few minutes, "been working over at Wainford. He says there be nigh three feet o' water at Sandy Bottom."

Now Miss Weston knew well enough that there was probably nothing like three feet of water at Sandy Bottom. There might be as much in the winter when the brook overflowed after the heavy rains, though that was doubtful; but now the water would scarcely be across the road, that she could aver. Still, Master Marchant's exaggeration was as good an excuse as any other for getting her own way.

"Well, Amy, we must enjoy Mrs. Hodges' hospitality to-night," she said, and to judge by the tone of her voice she meant to enjoy it too.

"What about letting Becky know?" asked Mrs. Hodges.

"That does not matter. Becky will only think that I saw the storm working up, and turned back

accordingly, with my usual discretion," explained Miss Weston.

Miss Weston's "usual discretion" was apparently a thing for laughter, and William's was not the only countenance which expressed an amused doubt.

So it was decided that the company at "The Traveller's Joy" should remain unbroken for that night. While Mrs. Hodges was busy clearing the table, Anthony recounted some of his bygone holidays on the road. He had seated himself in the chimney-corner, with the two girls opposite him on the settle; the wood fire crackled and glowed at their feet. Not that it was cold, but there is always an air of comfort and cheerfulness about a wood fire even in June, if the weather be wet. In the bar William was smoking his evening pipe, an immense German thing which a previous guest had given him in memory of a sojourn at the inn; an artist, it maybe, whose sense of proportion had prompted him to give something fashioned on the same liberal scale as William himself.

"I do envy you men," said Miss Weston, at the end of one of Anthony's episodes, "able to put on your knapsacks and set out when and where you

will. How you must get to love the country, seeing it in such an ideal way!"

"One must begin by loving it," replied Anthony, "but by getting into such close touch with it one loves it more and more, so that one is loth to leave the road."

"Even for an inn?"

"Even for a 'Traveller's Joy,' Miss Weston. There is a wonderful fascination about the road. I am at heart a wayfarer, a vagabond if you will, and when I come under the spell of summer, the road calls me and I must be off."

Miss Weston's chin rested on the back of her clasped fingers; the firelight glowed and flickered on her face.

"Go on," she said, when he paused.

"Then there is no sight so beautiful as the open road winding away before me, over wild heaths and commons in the sunlight, climbing up some windy hill, or dropping gently into a secluded hamlet; going on and on between trees and hedgerows, by fields and streams, with the great sky always over. Oh, the very thought of it is an enthusiasm!"

"That is just how I should feel," responded Miss Weston, catching the exaltation of Anthony's mood.

"I love the country, the whole wild loveliness of it all, and every part of the life of it, down to the merest old reprobate of a cow that ever got into the corn." And again laughter was uppermost.

"Then you wouldn't care to be a town dweller?" Anthony queried.

"No, I could not bear to live in a town, life is too grey there; but here in the country everything has colour and is beautiful and lovable. Nothing in the routine of the country seems too trivial, however common it may be; but in the town it all seems poor and faded and unhappy."

Anthony pondered.

"But surely all towns are not like that," he said, "grey and unhappy. I know some delightful old towns, quaint and beautiful, whither the road had led me. Grey they may be, but with age alone, and life in them is as fresh as ever; they are places wherein one may feel glad and easeful."

Miss Weston nodded.

"I know them," she said, "but are they not more like big villages, those beautiful towns of yours, than the places I had in my mind? I am afraid I am stupid at definitions. I mean those places that seem to have forgotten the fields and the sunshine

and the things that grow, they are the grey ones. They seem to make one ache somewhere inside, because they are so ugly and pitiful, and the people so taken up with things that never bring them any good. The towns you speak of can never be like that, or your road would only lead you away from them, never to them." Her voice became deeper and more persuasive because of her earnestness.

"I am afraid you are right," responded Anthony. "After all, give me the road before me and a good inn for my journey's end."

"Your journeys sometimes end rather early in the day," laughed Miss Weston.

"One doesn't often come upon a 'Traveller's Joy,'" he explained.

"What do you call a good inn?"

"One that, however comfortably it may house you, will never let you forget the road; that, while affording good entertainment, always keeps a door open to the road that runs by it; a place that holds you without restraint, sends you forth without regret, and sets you upon your journey eager for whatever the day may have in store. And of such is 'The Traveller's Joy,'" he added, for he did not

foresee how loth he would be to set forth again therefrom.

"One of these days Madge will be missing," observed Miss Warren. "She will have set out at daybreak to seek for herself the charm of the road."

Apparently Miss Weston thought there were more unlikely things than that.

"I have often thought how splendid it would be to go just as I might please, gipsy fashion if you will," she said, "but I have never summoned up sufficient courage to try it."

"Hardly a question of courage, is it?" said Anthony.

Miss Weston's eyes met his frankly.

"Perhaps not. I do not trouble very much about appearances, or about what other people say; but a girl has many things to consider before attempting a lonely walking tour. I sometimes wish I were a man, that I could do exactly as I wish."

"If only we men could do exactly as we wish!" thought Anthony, noting how red her lips were in the firelight.

"I think you do pretty much as you like now," responded Miss Warren. "Why, even Uncle Ralph lets you have your own way."

"Someone else will have her own way, I am thinking," laughed Anthony, as Winnie, who had come to bid them "good night," climbed into Miss Weston's lap, and sat there, a contented heap.

"I'll sit on your knee anover time, Uncle Tony," said Winnie; "you haven't got a lap."

Which fact was obvious enough, and Anthony surveyed his knees in a whimsical fashion.

"Why haven't men got laps?" demanded Winnie.

"Perhaps it is because they don't wear frocks, dear," suggested Miss Weston, with an apologetic glance at the orange-striped petticoat which adorned her.

A short time afterwards Mrs. Hodges, having put Winnie to bed, came in hurriedly.

"Oh, Miss Weston," she said, "whatever shall we do? The rain's come in, and your bed is wet through. You can't sleep in it to-night."

Here was a dilemma. Miss Weston had a smile ready as usual, but her face expressed disappointment.

"I suppose we must go home after all," she said, and they looked rather blankly at each other.

Anthony rose to the occasion with a brilliant suggestion.

"There is my room at liberty, if Mrs. Hodges does not mind making up a bed for me in the parlour."

"It is very good of you, Mr. Lane, but we couldn't turn you out in that manner."

"That wouldn't matter," Anthony said confidently. "I would as soon sleep in the parlour as in the bedroom;" this was hardly a high recommendation for Mrs. Hodges' best bedroom.

"Well, Mrs. Hodges, what do you say?" asked Miss Weston.

Mrs. Hodges pondered a minute.

"I don't mind at all, miss. I'll soon make up a bed for Mr. Lane, if you like. You must do as you please."

"I have no wish to go home now," said Miss Warren.

"Nor I," agreed the other heartily.

"Then we will stay, Mrs. Hodges."

"And I will sleep the sleep of the just, downstairs," said Anthony.

"It is very kind of you," Miss Weston told him.

Anthony was not conscious that any special feeling of benevolence had prompted his offer. The slight

and somewhat droll service he was rendering pleased his fancy, and he was delighted at being able to play knight-errant in even so trivial a matter. He told them so.

Soon after half-past nine they were ready for bed, Miss Weston, for one, being used to the early hours of country folk, and Anthony having been up since sunrise. Cordial "good nights" were being exchanged, when William asked—

"Would you like anything to drink, miss? or you, sir?"

Anthony looked at Miss Weston. Upon a common impulse they both felt thirsty.

"I propose," said he, "that we drink to a speedy meeting again."

Miss Weston clapped her hands.

"A toast! Just the very thing to finish the day. But what shall it be—cider?"

"I should like cider," said Miss Warren.

"And I," agreed Anthony.

William was waiting.

"Your very best cider, please, Mr. Hodges," Anthony demanded.

"I only make one kind, sir," replied William, with gruff dignity, as he went to fetch it.

Anthony sat himself on the corner of the table—a good sturdy piece of furniture—one leg swinging idly. He did not speak; he was thinking what a picture the two girls made. Miss Warren had sat down again on the settle, and Madge—as Anthony now called her in his mind—was standing, gazing into the embers; their faces were lit with a soft rosy glow from the dying fire, and the gay colours of Madge's petticoat made a splash of brightness that stood out from the mysterious shadows of the room. William returned, bearing three pewter mugs quaintly shaped, and some of his "very best." Anthony poured it out till the cups were brimming, then he handed one each to Madge and Miss Warren.

"I drink to another wetting and to another merry meeting," he said, holding his cup aloft.

"For shame, sir!" laughed Madge, as their cups touched.

"May the wetting be yours, then," piously added Miss Warren. "I drink to all this merry company," she said, as though they were three hundred instead of three, sweeping her cup round with strict impartiality.

"I to 'The Traveller's Joy,'" said Madge, touching her cup to Anthony's. Their eyes met

beneath their uplifted arms, and for an instant each looked intently at the other, as a man will look at the comrade whom he pledges; then the eyes of the girl fell, and she flushed, but the eyes of the man still held a strange light in them, as of one who saw things sweet and joyous.

So it came about that Sam slept in a strange stable that night, after all.

CHAPTER V.

HOW, AFTER SOME DELAY, ANTHONY TOOK THE RIGHT ROAD.

IT must not be imagined that Anthony fell asleep very speedily. He went altogether the wrong way to do that. First he tried to think *why* Madge held such an attraction for him. Of course, it was hopeless. There were a hundred excellent reasons why, which seemed very inadequate, however, when considered one by one in cold blood. Not that Anthony was capable of considering anything in cold blood just then. That he had never met anyone quite like her might explain the attraction; but then he chanced to think of his aunt, and he was equally sure there was no one just like *her*—at least, he hoped not—so, as an argument, that was a failure.

He ceased to puzzle himself as to the possible causes, and gave himself up to the attraction itself. There was no mistake about that. He was already planning to continue his stay at "The Traveller's

Joy" if possible. He must know more of this girl. It was not only her face, her voice, her joyous mien, and her lightheartedness which pleased his fancy; he was conscious of some deeper charm, some underlying significance for him, of which these were but the outward expression, as the June roses are the tangible expression of indwelling summer.

So he lay, alternately thinking and dozing, giving himself up to the sweet waywardness of his fancies, yet chiding himself for his folly. What could there be between him and Madge beyond the pleasant memory of a chance acquaintance? "Nothing," he resolutely told himself, only to make plans the next minute for furthering that acquaintance. Finally he did go to sleep—having made up his mind to be up betimes in the morning—to dream of a young wood goddess (or was it a witch maid?) who gave him a magic cloak, for what purpose he could not be quite sure; but, oddly enough, it was gay with orange stripes like a petticoat he had once seen a gipsy maid wearing, of whom he wrote a story that had no end.

Had Anthony overheard a short conversation that took place upstairs he would not have gone to sleep so full of anticipation for the morrow. The result

of the conversation was that when William rose early and made ready to journey into the town he also harnessed Sam into the trap; and soon after six o'clock Madge and Amy appeared, and, after bidding good-bye to William and his wife, resumed their broken journey homewards.

"Remember us to Mr. Lane when he wakes," said Madge as they drove away. "Don't forget, Mrs. Hodges," she added mysteriously.

It was well after seven o'clock when Anthony did wake. The morning being dull, he had slept on somewhat later than he had intended. He was in a very contented frame of mind, anticipating a pleasant breakfast with the charming company of the previous evening. He whistled snatches of song as he hastily donned such portions of his apparel as were necessary to a journey to the washhouse, where it was arranged that he should perform his ablutions. He was standing with dripping face when Mrs. Hodges came in.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hodges," he said, blinking at her over the towel. "I am not so early as I meant to be. What time did Mr. Hodges start?"

"About half-past six, sir."

"I must have slept soundly, for I did not hear

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him. I am glad your other guests have not beaten me," he vouchsafed.

It was Mrs. Hodges' private opinion that they *had* beaten him; but she knew the value of reserve, and waited for him to go on.

"I suppose they will soon be down?"

Mrs. Hodges smiled.

"They came down a long time ago," she said, "and told me to be sure to remember them to you when you woke, leastways Miss Weston did."

"Remember them to me!" he echoed. "You don't mean to say they are gone already?"

He looked very blank indeed. Mrs. Hodges was obliged to admit that such was indeed the case. Anthony's expression must have been very comical, for she laughed aloud, until there was nothing for it but that he must laugh too. He felt very disgusted with himself. If only he had been up as early as he had intended, Miss Weston's little scheme—he was sure it was hers—would have failed.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he soliloquised, falling back on his favourite colloquialism, though he felt that the situation demanded a stronger expletive. "Fancy going off like that!"

Instead of being the lively meal he had anticipated, breakfast was a very orderly affair. He had plenty of time over it, too, to ponder on the fallibility of carefully-laid plans, which did not, however, prevent him making further ones. Even Winnie found him preoccupied; he did not pay much attention to her chatter, although he was pleased to have her with him.

Had Miss Weston intended to raise Anthony's desire to know more of herself to a higher pitch of action, she could hardly have chosen a surer way of doing so. Not that any such intention was hers when she suggested that they should leave before he was up. That was merely the result of caprice, or perhaps of feminine intuition, which is much the same thing. Yet it must be confessed the thought that Anthony might stay on at "The Traveller's Joy" for a day or two at least made her half expect and half hope that she would see more of him. Had it been otherwise Anthony might not have been left to breakfast alone.

Over that solitary meal Anthony, as I have said, laid plans and thought of many things. That Miss Weston was a girl of spirit he had been ready to believe from his first sight of her; now

he was sure of it, and his desire to know further concerning her was quickened.

He became a positive nuisance to Mrs. Hodges, yet all his adroit questionings failed to elicit the desired knowledge. Not wishing to appear too inquisitive, he refrained from asking too direct questions, and as a consequence he received anything but direct answers.

"Does Miss Weston live far from here?" he asked, when he had skilfully led a desultory conversation up to the desired point.

"Not very far, sir, for fine weather, but too far to go in a storm like we had yesterday," replied Mrs. Hodges.

"Not too far to go home about six o'clock in the morning though," thought Anthony. "How many miles should you think?" he ventured.

"Not many, sir, by the road, and about one less across the fields."

Really Mrs. Hodges was very obtuse.

"How long would it take Miss Weston to get home this morning?"

Anthony wondered what question to put next.

"I don't know, sir." Mrs. Hodges shook her head. "Miss Weston often lets Sam go pretty

much as he likes. I should think they are home by this time, though," she added brightly.

Anthony changed his tactics.

"Where *does* Miss Weston live, Mrs. Hodges?"

"At Whindles, sir."

The reply was direct enough this time, but Anthony was none the wiser for it.

"Whindles!" He had never heard that name before. He went upstairs and studied his map with a diligence deserving of better results, but nothing of Whindles could he see. Then he went into the garden, to ponder still on the possible whereabouts of Whindles. He was too restless to stay there long, however, so he went out to explore further this fascinating country.

No sooner was he well upon the road than every nerve in him tingled with pleasure, and his blood danced to the piping of the breeze in the trees. The dullness of the early morning had given way before an ardent sun; the sky was broken into spaces of misty blue and white. He threw his head back and sniffed the rain-washed sweetness of June. There was hawthorn, almond-scented, white and pink, whose petals the rain had scattered as for a bridal; there was briar in the hedge, and white

clover here and there by the roadside; the wind came, bearing incense from a field of yellow charlock, full of the smell of the moist earth.

He had planned a long tramp through a still less-frequented part of the country to northward and westward of this. What fate, he wondered, had kept him at "The Traveller's Joy," attracted by its charm of English homeliness and quiet beauty. He knew it would be some time before he took to the road in earnest again.

He walked on between high banks of sandstone crowned with oak and birch. The light was soft, green above the red-yellow of the sand. By and by the road forked. He examined the sign-post carefully, but found no indication of Whindles; so, being in some dilemma, he took the right-hand road and trusted himself to fortune. The other road, he noticed, went to Wainford. He was not destined to find Whindles that day, however, although he went many miles in search of it.

Late in the afternoon he turned up again at the inn, muddy and hungry after a glorious tramp, and wondering if Mrs. Hodges, under instructions from Miss Weston, had purposely mystified him.

William was back from the town; he met Anthony

with a smile of quiet interrogation. When Mrs. Hodges was not present Anthony put a question to him point-blank.

"Whereabouts in Wainford does Miss Weston live, Mr. Hodges?"

"Right t'other end, sir, just this side o' the bridge."

"Thank you!"

Anthony had found what he wanted now.

"You'll see the name o' the house upon the gaate," added William.

The next morning Anthony intimated that he was going to Wainford, and that if there was anything he could take for Mrs. Hodges he would be very pleased. He asked the name of the village next beyond Wainford, in case he should want to go on to there. William told him it was called Oakhurst.

Wainford was a pretty village, with much of that old-world charm which is common to many of these south-country villages. It was chiefly one long, irregular street, leading towards the river. Anthony walked leisurely through it, noting a quaint weather-tiled cottage here, a beautiful piece of old timbering there; here a garden with the roses just beginning

to bloom, there a piece of wanton neglect for which he had ever a curse ready. All the time he thought of Whindles and of Madge. Suddenly he saw a flutter of blue ribbon, and slackened his pace; there, a few yards ahead, was Madge herself, talking to a man in clerical garb.

"Hang that parson-fellow!" he muttered to himself.

Anthony was no lover of parsons, and he felt aggrieved and suddenly enraged that Madge should be monopolised by one just at that moment. Apparently she did not see him, but he, drawing nearer, feasted his eyes to his heart's content. How dainty she looked, how fresh and strong—full of sunshine and the open air! She wore a blue frock, the colour of a harebell as near as may be, and a big straw hat fastened beneath her chin, so that it looked like an old-fashioned bonnet.

When he was almost up to them, and preparing to pass by unseen, Madge turned and held out her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Lane, how are you?" It quite took his breath away for a moment. "Where are you going?" she asked, while the parson lingered to glare at him.

He hesitated. With that fellow there, how could he tell her he had come in search of Whindles?

"To Oakhurst," he said.

"Oh, that is may way," she replied.

The parson raised his hat, and with a final glare at Anthony bade Madge a frigid "good afternoon."

"So arctic a greeting is refreshing on a hot afternoon like this, isn't it?" said Madge as she and Anthony walked on together.

Anthony laughed; not a fig cared he for the parson now.

"His politeness was rather forced," he said. "I think he would have preferred being rude to me."

Madge smiled up at him.

"I hope you are not offended with me for stopping you as I did, but I wanted to get rid of that man; he is my pet aversion, and the more I snub him the more agreeable he tries to be."

"Offended—I?" gasped Anthony inwardly. "I am very glad you did speak," he said aloud. "Do you know, I was sadly disappointed yesterday, Miss Weston."

"Were you?"—this very demurely.

"Yes. Instead of the jolly breakfast which I had

anticipated, I had mine alone in a most orderly manner."

"You were up rather late, were you not?"

"Someone else was up very early," he corrected.

"It was too bad, I know, after we had turned you out of your bedroom too! I don't know why we did it," she admitted, looking at him with laughing eyes.

"Why *we* did it!" he echoed, trying to imagine what Amy's part might have been. "How is Miss Warren?" he asked.

"She is well, thank you; none the worse for the wetting."

They were now at the end of the village and Madge came to a standstill outside an oaken gate, whereon Anthony read the name "Whindles." Between the trees he saw a low rambling house, stone roofed and red chimneyed.

"I may stay for some days at 'The Traveller's Joy,'" he said, wishing that Whindles lay farther afield.

"Oh, I am glad!"

The reply was exactly what Anthony hoped for.

"Are you?" he said.

"Yes; I love the country here so well that I am

glad you will be able to know a little of it. I think you may learn to love it too."

"I think I may, too," he replied with conviction.

"Good-bye, Mr. Lane," said Madge, giving him her hand. "Thank you for turning up so opportunely to the discomfiture of the Rev. Mr. Stall. If you were not bound for Oakhurst I would ask you to come in; as it is, I hope you will enjoy your walk. Good-bye!" and she was gone.

Elated though he was, Anthony felt not a little ruffled.

"If you were not bound for Oakhurst." Oh, the irony of it! Just then he felt that Oakhurst was the last place he wanted to see. Yet since he had said that he was bound for Oakhurst, to Oakhurst he must go, if only to redeem his word.

But—"hang that parson-fellow!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH TELLS HOW ANTHONY ENTERED WHINDLE BY THE WATERWAY, AND WHAT HAPPENE THEREAT.

THE weather seemed to have settled again, an all trace of Tuesday's storm had vanishe Friday morning found Anthony astir early. H religiously went through a lengthy process of abl tion in the wash-hand basin; this he eloquentl styled "bathing." Certainly he succeeded i bathing a goodly portion of his surroundings, an that part of the floor nearest him had the appea ance of having been treated to a very liber shower bath.

The absence of adequate means for the mornir tub was, perhaps, the only drawback to the in and in the country it is a common one, though tl usual scantiness of bedroom furniture makes tl basin an easier substitute.

So Anthony splashed to his heart's content. H felt very pleased with himself, and perhaps mac

even more mess than usual, for he had not only found Whindles, but had made up his mind to call there that very morning. No journey to Oakhurst this time! Parson or no parson, his errand was to see Miss Weston; or to see over that delightful old house, as he repeatedly told himself. For Anthony, though nothing loth to acknowledge that Miss Weston was the cause of his indefinitely prolonged stay in that neighbourhood, yet seemed to derive a somewhat piquant pleasure from trying to make himself believe otherwise. Not having given himself wholly up to the charm of Miss Weston's personality, he was as yet something of an epicure concerning the delights of these last three days.

In that mood he walked across the fields to Wainford on that June morning. With joy not deep enough for silence yet real enough to urge him into song, he would break now and again into the refrain of some half remembered melody, setting back his head the while as one to whom the face of the sky was gladness; perhaps to fling his snatch of song more directly skywards. For who, if his singing be of joy, will not send his song upwards?

And yet he told himself that he was only going to get a glimpse of that inviting old place!

His path went through meadows that were gold with the glory of early June. What hay there would be! What tumbled beds of sweet clover! He thought it almost a pity that the wonder of the fields must go, even in so delicious a manner.

There are few meadows more beautiful than those that lie just within shelter of the downs. None sweeter, nor richer with purple clover and golden buttercups and long lush grass. None that seem to slope and curve in such an odd, delightful way, with scarcely a level acre. It is like a gold and yellow sea, wherein the oak woods and the little hazel coppices between are the fortunate isles; and all day long the bees hum over the clover their undersong of irresistible summer. And out of those green and golden meadows, beyond the tillage and the trees, the hills rise into the soft haze and smiling blue of June, and beyond them—one can imagine it—southward lies the sea.

When Anthony reached Whindles he opened the gate without any ado, and went boldly up to the house, his heart beating high with expectation. The door was set back within a porch whose chief

business just then was to provide support for a sweet tangle of honeysuckle and white clematis which tumbled about it, and even seemed bent on making its way into the house. The door itself stood invitingly open—a happy omen, thought Anthony.

He rang the bell and waited. He was prepared to give Miss Weston what he hoped would be a pleasant surprise, when an elderly, stout, and altogether comfortable-looking body answered his summons.

"Becky," thought Anthony.

No, Miss Weston was not at home, she told him in response to his question, and she did not know just when she would be in; she thought Miss Weston had gone up the river.

There was something of a not-to-be-argued-with air about Becky, in spite of her comfortable appearance; so Anthony, with a wistful look over her ample shoulder into the cool haven beyond, turned and sought the road again.

To tell the truth, he was disappointed. He thought the only thing to soothe that disappointment would be a pull up the river, and then an idle hour or two in a quiet spot with a book. Besides —yes, he really must go on the river!

So at the bridge he hired the lightest boat he could procure and pushed off. He was doubtful whether to go up or down stream. If only he knew in which direction Miss Weston had gone! Finally he decided to go up stream, although Whindles lay the other way, yielding perhaps to some innate preference or instinct which urges a man up rather than down a river, especially if it be a strange one.

It was not a big river—no river in this southern county is big—but above the bridge it was beautiful in a homely, affectionate way, and dearly English. With many a delightful bend, like the quaint turns of an old writer; with here a pebbly shallow and there a wide sweep—where for a moment it fancied itself really important, to reflect so much of the sky—it flowed in its own leisurely fashion, going whole field lengths out of its way to receive tribute of a small dependant, the largest and nearly the noisiest of the brooks.

After pulling for nearly a couple of miles, Anthony found a secluded harbourage just round a bend, where the trees grew down to the water's edge, their lower branches dipping in the stream. On the other side were meadows, yellow and green,

with tall sorrell waving red ensigns among the sedges and water-bent, to mark June's pathway by the shining summer river.

Anthony hitched his little craft to a convenient stump and prepared to take his ease. Like most men who are really active, he was a master of the art of making himself comfortable. Up stream or down there was none in sight; the river seemed left to drowsy flies, and cows that stood where the stream ran shallow about the precincts of a farm. Nor was there any sign of Miss Weston.

He let the boat drift out till it lay right across the stream, and then arranged himself in the laziest manner possible. He felt that it was useless to go any farther in the hope of finding Madge; either she had not gone on the river at all, or else she had taken the other direction, towards the hills, where the river was wider, but hardly so beautiful as this, Anthony thought.

A heron came sailing by with wide, silent wings; the swifts, more wideawake than anything else, darted past, twittering shrilly as they skimmed the water; away over the meadow a pair of peewits uttered their strange, grievous cry, which left the hum of unseen insects the more insistent. These

things were part of the life he loved. He hearkened, and the book he drew out of his pocket remained unread.

He felt very lazy and warm, and presently he changed his position. He hauled the cushion into the bottom of the boat and sat himself across it, with his legs thrust out on one side, and his head perilously near the water on the other. He could see the clear sky above him, beyond the trees; and the sunlight, broken by the moving leaves, fell upon his face.

Perhaps it was the subdued humming of the tiny summer folk who haunted that stream and danced in the sunbeams that made him so drowsy, or the clear tinkle of a runnel trickling into the river behind a tuft of grass. Or was it that gentlest of breezes which wafted him to the brink of slumber, where he still heard, though dreamily, the water gurgling under the boat, and was conscious of the air and the sunlight and the whispering trees?

But he heard no sound of approaching oars, and suddenly there was a sharp rap, and before he could realise what had happened to him he was tipped head foremost into the water, and found himself

making for the bank, wet and muddy, but thoroughly awakened.

Instead of Anthony finding Madge, she had found him; indeed, she had caught him napping, for hers was the boat which, coming into contact with his, had so gently and surely precipitated him into the water.

"Oh, Mr. Lane," she exclaimed, when she saw who it was, "I am so sorry!"

The whole incident was over too quickly to give her time for anxiety.

Anthony, whose first instinct was to recover his perpendicular, had scrambled up the bank, and was now shaking himself like a retriever.

He blinked his apology.

"It was entirely my fault, Miss Weston," he said, when he had recovered his breath. It was wonderful how cheery he seemed over it. "I should not have let the boat drift across stream like that. I suppose I was dozing. At least, I seemed to wake up pretty suddenly," he added, and they both laughed.

"You are in a pickle!" Madge criticised, as Anthony ruefully surveyed his muddy garments.

"You had better come home with me to change

your wet clothes. It will not take us long to get back. Unless," she added, "you would rather stay here and dry in the sun."

"Hark at her," thought Anthony; "*would* I rather stay here, when she asks me to Whindles!"

"Oh, you lucky dog!" he whispered to himself.

"O blessed river!" he murmured aloud.

"What did you say?" asked Madge, who was not near enough to catch his words.

"If you are sure I shall not bother," be began.

"Come along then," said Madge. "We can find you a change of garments while your own are drying."

Anthony pondered a moment; possibly he was wondering how petticoats might become him; his figure was hardly the one to do justice to feminine attire.

He looked up, and Madge's eyes met his with a smile of comprehension.

"It will be all right," she said; "I have a brother about your size."

Then they both laughed outright.

"I did wonder for a minute how we should manage the drying process," he acknowledged.

Anthony suggested that he should take Madge in

tow, but she scorned the idea. She was young and independent, and practice had made her a splendid oarswoman; she had no difficulty in keeping close astern, although Anthony set a good swinging pace. So they went homewards between the banks where the yellow flags grew, and under the old grey bridge, without a pause until they reached the "water-gate" —as Madge put it—of Whindles. And to Anthony, wet and bemuddied though he was, the way seemed all too short.

Madge left him to fasten up the boats while she hastened to give certain instructions to James regarding the unexpected visitor. James was the one proper and workaday name of "Mr. Becky"; any surname he may have been blessed with was well-nigh forgotten in that household wherein he was both an appreciated retainer and a useful, if a somewhat submissive, husband.

Deferential and beaming over this unwonted procedure on the part of his mistress—for strangers were rare at Whindles—he piloted Anthony upstairs, and left him to the pleasure of a "tub." He returned shortly with a supply of garments, including a suit of flannels. Madge had an idea that Anthony would look well in flannels, showing thereby that she was

a young person of some discernment. The blazer took Anthony's eye at once; it was a crimson one, with gold pipings—a gorgeous object. He fancied he had seen it before. Taking it up, he examined it carefully, and found a college badge worked upon the breast. Evidently the discovery pleased him.

"Weston, Weston," he repeated to himself, trying to connect the name with an old acquaintance of his college days. "Why it can never be old Goldie?"

His feelings were in keeping with his gay attire as he made his way downstairs.

Madge met him in the hall.

"Now I can welcome you to Whindles in a proper manner, Mr. Lane," she said, giving him a warm, firm hand.

Being an Englishman, he stifled a righteous desire to put it to his lips, and together they passed into the room. There Miss Warren also gave him a cordial greeting. Between them the two girls made him feel as though he were an expected guest.

Anthony was inclined to think it the most delightful room he had ever seen. Originally the kitchen, when Whindles was still a farmhouse, it

enjoyed a glorified maturity, with its oak beams and its spacious hearth unspoiled in its altered fortunes.

"Let me introduce you to Moses," said Madge, as an ample specimen of a spaniel ambled in wagging a stumpy tail.

"Moses! Why Moses?" asked Anthony.

Madge laughed.

"Because I pulled him out from among the rushes, and have educated him like a very Egyptian," Madge explained. "He is a most artful old Moses."

"So you have been getting into mischief too, Mr. Lane?" said Amy.

"Yes; if 'Mischief' is the name of this river, then I certainly have," retorted Anthony.

"Having assisted you to get into mischief, Mr. Lane, I must do my best to make amends," Madge said. "Will you stay to dinner? My uncle is not here to welcome you, but he would be delighted to have you with us if he were."

Madge was not so sure though that Uncle Ralph would approve of this proceeding; but she usually did as she pleased and sought his approval afterwards. Nor did she often fail to obtain it.

Of course there was nothing Anthony would like better than to stay to dinner—and to tea too, for the matter of that. And as for Uncle Ralph—well, Anthony was getting on quite nicely without him, and already seemed very much at home.

"Miss Weston, I feel quite like an old friend in these clothes," he said. "Had you a brother at St. Wilfrid's, and was he usually nicknamed 'Goldie'? I recognised the arms of my old college, and I fancy I have seen this blazer before."

"Yes, Dick was at St. Wilfrid's; how strange that it should be your old college too!" and Madge looked more pleased than she could say. "I must welcome you again for his sake. But I do not remember hearing him mention your name," she went on, wrinkling her brows; "perhaps you were not exactly a cronie of his?"

"Perhaps not, exactly," Anthony responded, choosing his words carefully; "but we were rather intimate, and I often went to his rooms."

"I remember several of whom he used to tell me—Barnes and Astley, Morrison, Fulham and Penrose; but I do not remember your name, Mr. Lane."

Anthony felt that the situation required very delicate handling. Mr. Lane and Mr. Penrose were for the time being different persons, and he thought he could hardly blend them just then. Miss Weston evidently had no idea who he really was, and he preferred that she should still think of him as Mr. Lane—if she thought of him at all—until he could present himself with full credentials as Anthony Lane Penrose, author. Meanwhile he must remember, in the personality of Mr. Lane, to beware of any awkward entanglements which might call for a somewhat lengthy explanation.

"Your brother left college a year before I did," he said; "perhaps that explains it."

"Ah, perhaps it does!" assented Madge, though evidently she was not quite satisfied. It really was very odd that Dick had made no mention of Mr. Lane.

"Where is Dick now?" asked Anthony.

"He has been in Canada for nearly three years. My father died soon after Dick left college, and I came here to keep house for Uncle Ralph."

"I remember Goldie wanted to go abroad and to rough it. He was always talking of pioneering

or exploring or farming in some out-of-the-way place."

Madge laughed.

"That was just Dick, dear old boy! You knew him well enough to understand him then. I wonder why he never mentioned you. Do you remember others of his set?"

"Yes, Barnes was a great chum of mine, and Morrison I remember, and Penrose. Oh, Penrose was a queer fellow — one of those dreamy, lazy individuals, with just a nice spice of devil in him.' Anthony grew reckless. "He would be out in the sunshine by the hour, and if someone disturbed him he'd begin to quote Keats at them, or tell them how good it was to be alive. Lazy beggar! He could be active enough if he chose, though."

"I think I should have liked Mr. Penrose," said Madge.

Anthony received something of a shock. It was worth while to be Mr. Lane for the time being if only to hear Madge say that. "I wonder would she say it if she knew that I am Mr. Penrose?" thought he.

"Dick thought he was such a genuine, pleasant fellow," Madge continued, "and such good company.

He was clever, too; and, according to Dick, he might have done something great in literature if only he had been poor."

"If only he had been poor!" echoed Anthony, to cover his confusion.

"Yes; he was rather well off, you will remember, and was able to take things too easily, so he did not trouble to do much real work."

In the depths of his smitten conscience Anthony vowed to readjust the balance of work without further delay. He became suddenly aware of a goodly crop of sins of omission — to his healthy nature he owed it that they were not wild oats— and he viewed them with a whimsical reproachfulness that was not unmixed with a lurking regard.

"Perhaps he took himself rather too easily," he suggested. "From what I remember of Mr. Penrose he usually required an accumulation of energy to rout him out. I think a man can only do good work by taking himself seriously."

Anthony hardly knew whether he was taking himself seriously or not just then. That last phrase of his seemed to contain the germ of a new idea. Madge was inclined to agree with him.

"You knew Mr. Penrose very well, didn't you?" she asked.

"Very well indeed," said Anthony; "we were inseparable for a while."

"Oh, have you seen him of late?"

"Yes; he is as incorrigible as ever," replied Anthony, thinking Madge's curiosity by no means misplaced.

"Does he still take himself as easily?"

"Yes," Anthony sighed; "or, rather, he lets himself go—more easily than ever."

Madge thought she understood, but she did not.

During dinner—they always dined at midday at Whindles—the conversation drifted along pleasantly, and Anthony entertained them with many little incidents of his life at St. Wilfrid's, some of which Madge had doubtless heard before, when Dick had regaled his sister with some choice bits of well-appreciated fun.

Anthony soon became thoroughly at home, and Miss Warren found him hardly less agreeable than did Madge herself. They both came to the conclusion that he was rather a fine fellow.

There are certain men who are able without effort to make their presence welcome to the gentler sex;

who seem to possess some talisman—as unquestioned as it is indefinable, whether it be of manner, or of looks, or of a certain sweetness of temper, combined with a very real manliness—which admits them at once into that higher intimacy with womankind, whose outward sign is reverence and service. They are always manly men, and of such kind was Anthony.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH ANTHONY CONTINUES TO FIND WHINDLES MUCH TO HIS LIKING.

DINNER being over, Madge suggested that they should make their way into the garden.

It was a delightful garden, with a profusion of those homely old-fashioned flowers which seem to recall the days of comely girls clad in dainty, high-waisted frocks, who knew the secrets of herbs and simples, and who knew too the way to capture the hearts of young gallants who came in such brave array—days when the dress of the people was not shamed by the joyous aspect of the flowers themselves.

One had the impression that the house and the garden had grown up together, and were now inseparable comrades of a golden prime; for neither a house nor a garden reaches its prime until it begins to grow old.

There were roses in profusion, and modest stocks that smelled sweeter than all else at sundown; great

flaming poppies and slender columbines; pansies that looked out with wide purple eyes between the blue forget-me-nots, and Canterbury bells, with pinks and the old, sweet clove-carnations, whose promise exceeded their present blossoming. Then there were the children of later summer: tall lilies that would hold aloft their fair white chalices for the ardent sun of July to fill with sweetness; sunflowers, already grown tall; and dahlias, foretelling hot August days full of gorgeous colour. But always there were roses.

The young people seated themselves in a shady corner near the house, where, standing up, one could see over the rose-bushes and lavender beds to the meadows beyond, where the shining river made its way toward the hills.

"I do love a garden like this," remarked Anthony from the depths of a big basket chair wherein he was taking his ease. "It makes me a veritable lotus-eater. I could wish it were always afternoon," he added; and the murmur of the doves came softly through the warm air.

"Yet people sometimes ask me if I am not dull, living here all the year round," replied Madge.

"As if *she* could be dull, anywhere," thought Anthony fervently.

"Some people, though, seem to be made specially for the town," Amy put in. "You were made for the country, Madge."

"Yes, that's true; it is quite natural that I should find a home here; and I love it."

The shining of her eyes told how well indeed she loved it all—the house no less than the garden, and the garden no less than the country that lay beyond it. Anthony thought how well he too could learn to love such a home. He had no father alive, and his mother chose to live with her sister in a fashionable part of London, declaring that the country bored her, which was true enough. So for Anthony there was no home rich in associations, or clustered about with sweet memories, or set a thing of joy in the midst of beauty, as Whindles was. He had often seen such a place, and had peopled its nooks and corners with the children of his fancy, and had learned to read its storied beauty; but there was no such home for him at present save in his imagination.

"Your garb suggests tennis, Mr. Lane," Madge remarked, after they had let an hour slip by in delicious idleness. "Do you play?"

"Yes," replied Anthony with alacrity, "though I have not played very often since I left St. Wilfrid's."

"Would you care for a game now, or is it too hot?"

The heat mattered little; Anthony was inured to sunshine.

"I should like it exceedingly," he told her.

"Come along then," she said, leading the way.

The tennis-lawn was small and trim, as soft as velvet beneath the feet, for the turf came off those splendid hills. It lay lower than the rest of the garden, so that one had to go down two or three stone steps to gain its green level.

Madge and Anthony played the first game, and the latter lost. Had he watched the balls with the same keenness with which he watched his opponent the game might have ended differently.

The second game was won by Anthony. Like most active fellows, he was fond of games, and he had not lost all the prowess which he had gained at college. Madge was one of those comparatively few girls who can play a zealous game and still appear cool and in no way disconcerted or dishevelled. Anthony nearly missed several easy returns through

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sheer pleasure in watching her gracefulness and agility. Flushed and eager, she faced him, glowing with abundant health. Every movement was supple and graceful, and with her tennis seemed like a vigorous, radiant dance; it was no wonder that Anthony lost that first game.

A "set" was voted too lengthy, so Amy took the next game, and again Anthony won. Madge took the opportunity to watch him, and thought how well he looked. He had taken off the crimson blazer, and played only in his borrowed flannels, bareheaded, and with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his elbows, showing a sinewy forearm. With his lithe, active figure and brown face, he looked the embodiment of clean, vigorous manhood. He had a firm-set, well-moulded chin, and a kindly mouth that wore a smile more often than not, with something expressive of his easy-going nature lurking about the corners of it. Madge had already discovered how clear and unfaltering were his eyes. He had a trick of looking one hard in the face. Truly he was one to be trusted without question.

Madge and Anthony played a third game.

"I am not so sure that you will beat him this time, Madge," Amy said.

Perhaps she divined that her friend had also begun to watch the other player. They both played well, and for some time first Anthony and then Madge would hold a slight advantage, only to fall back level again. Finally Anthony failed to get his "vantage," and Madge, whose turn it was to serve, made such a charming picture that he missed his stroke again.

"Game!" cried Madge triumphantly, "but you did take a lot of beating."

There was laughter in her eyes as she looked at him in her frank, delightful way, and to that Anthony responded as much as to her remark.

"It was the jolliest game I have ever played," he averred.

"It should have ended sooner had I followed up my advantage," said Madge. "I don't understand how I managed to bungle it so."

"You are typical of your sex," replied Anthony oracularly.

"How?"

"Being what you are, you hold the advantage; but when the game is playing into your hands, and there is a premium upon your every stroke, something happens—which you never quite understand—and the other player wins."

"But the other player did not win this time," Madge corrected.

"No; but since we left off in the middle of a set the game really remains unfinished. If we had played to the end——"

"You would have won," put in Madge.

"Exactly, I should have won."

"What sophistry," exclaimed Amy, laughing. "I thought it was always considered an advantage to be a man."

"And I often wish I were a man," added Madge.

"Ah, you view things from one standpoint only, and your outlook is limited," said Anthony. "Now, if you were a man——

"I should have the advantage of a wider outlook," finished Madge, looking at him with laughing eyes.

Anthony ignored the interruption.

"You would know that in the game of life woman holds the advantage always, if she choose, even though she may let the other player win."

"We will play those other three games another day, Mr. Lane," said Madge, in a tone that meant she would win them too, if she could.

"You had better not. I am sure to win,"

replied Anthony with confidence as he resumed his blazer.

"We will see. Remember, I hold the advantage."

"To lose is not always unpleasant," murmured Amy, as though thinking aloud.

Anthony reflected. Was he already playing that deeper game—the game wherein the winner must surrender all; a passage of arms, a bout of merriment if you will; yet withal far more than a game, for the prize is joy, the very crown of a man's life? Could he be as confident of winning that game? He looked across the fields shimmering in the golden afternoon, and then at the brown head and glad, sunny face of the girl beside him. His answer was there, though as yet neither knew it.

Let the game be played! Let there be laughter and sweet raillery, the wooing of shy eyes, and the joyous music of human passion! But the winner is known already, for 'tis Fate that plays the game. Fate has many names: one is Love, another is Joy, Sorrow it may be, or Heart's-Emptiness, but Fate always wins.

"Would you like to look round the other part of the garden, Mr. Lane?" Madge asked, after they had rested for a considerable time.

Anthony was kicking his heels on the smooth turf, letting Madge do most of the talking, that he might have the pleasure of listening to her. He assented, jumping eagerly to his feet.

"I think I will stay here, Madge," said Amy, opening a book which she had with her, and so the two went together.

Amy really would have liked to have gone with them, though she knew the garden almost by heart. But she was by no means unlearned in the difficult art of self-effacement, where her friend was concerned. She discerned that Madge was already finding a great pleasure in Anthony's companionship, and imagined that she herself would not be wanted. There was a very thoughtful look in her light grey eyes as she watched them go across the grass together, for she knew the depth of feeling and strength of character that lay beneath her friend's gaiety of mood, and indeed made that lightheartedness the reality it was. Suppose Madge should lose her heart to Anthony—a not impossible event thought Amy—was he of those who, faithful and true, are found worthy of a great devotion. Amy wondered. Yet Anthony seemed to have the capacity for being uncommonly happy, and there

was that about him which disarmed all criticism or foreboding.

Madge certainly did find Anthony a delightful companion. There was a vigour and freshness about him which appealed to her unspoiled nature. She did not know many men, and the few she did know compared rather unfavourably with her brother; but even the absent Dick had found his equal at last.

But what *was* Anthony? Was he an aimless dilettante, who spent his time in taking holidays? He was too manly, too sturdy, and altogether too fond of an open-air life to be a mere æsthete. But what was he? Madge puzzled herself with that question.

After a very short acquaintance they had become so intimate that it seemed strange he should say nothing about his work.

They reached the limit of the garden, and leaning against the low wall which separated the orchard from the fields, they both looked back over that fair homestead, with its old grey roof and its red chimneys. Madge turned to her companion.

"I have been wondering what you are, Mr. Lane," she said. "May I ask if you have any particular profession?"

Those who love the great world of Nature, who, with seeing eyes and understanding hearts, search each mystery of the beautiful life about them, are rarely possessed of that curiosity which, concerning itself with the business of their fellows, is the hall-mark of vulgarity. Yet it was perfectly natural that Madge, who was not usually inquisitive, should seek to know more concerning Anthony, and of the work he perhaps left undone.

He paused a moment before he replied, thinking of Mr. Penrose.

"I do not have to work for my living, if that is what you mean."

"But you are not an idler," Madge protested.

"Not by profession, though I think I am one at present."

"Mrs. Hodges said she was sure you were an artist. Was she right?"

Anthony shook his head at that, laughing.

"No, I am sorry she was not. I could not paint a picture to save my life, much as I love colour and all beautiful things."

"Then what are you, Mr. Lane? Surely you are not altogether without ambition. You look as if you could be anything you choose." This

last was obviously too sincere to be merely a compliment.

"No, I am not entirely devoid of ambition, Miss Weston; in fact, I am very ambitious in one direction."

For the moment Anthony heartily wished he had never allowed himself to become other than Mr. Penrose; he wanted to show this girl that he was not altogether the unworthy idler which she might think him.

"The truth is, Miss Weston, I have a great desire to make a place for myself in literature. Not for fame, nor for a pastime merely, but for the sake of creating a thing of beauty. Do you understand?"

Madge looked up, radiant. Here was matter for hero worship.

"Oh, I am glad!" she said. "What is it you would write?"

Anthony squared his shoulders.

"I would write of the joy of life, of the charm and strength of simplicity, of the loveliness of the world, and in my writing there should be nothing but what was of beauty. I would put into words my love of the earth and the fairness of it. I would take of the sunshine and put it into song.

I would take of the dew, of the flowers, and of the radiant life of the fields; of the sea and the might of the wind, and the rush of eager clouds; of the glory of sunrise and of sunset, and of the mystery of night and the stars: I would take of it all, and put it into music, and sing back the lost youth of the world." His face was aglow with his enthusiasm, and the girl beside him caught the glow of it. Mr. Penrose was taking himself seriously enough now. "That is what I dream of doing," he added after a pause. "But——" He shook his head.

"And you will do it; I am sure you will," returned Madge. "Now I understand more than ever your love of the road, for surely there is no other way so straight to the heart of Nature. And I thought you merely an idler," she went on. "Forgive me, won't you?" and she touched his arm with a pretty gesture.

"Why, what is there to forgive?" replied Anthony. "Because I dream a rare and beautiful dream I am not the less, but rather the more, human; so I delight in idleness—at times. In fact, a love of ease has been my bane," he added, thinking of Mr. Penrose.

"Have you published anything yet?" asked Madge. "I do not remember hearing your name; or do you use a *nom de plume?*"

"Oh, no! I would not let a book of mine bear any name but my own. For good or ill it would be my own work, and should bear my own name. Tony Lane has yet to make a name for himself."

The significance of this last remark was entirely lost on his companion, who wondered why he laughed. It struck him how comical it was that he, who had such decided opinions as to the use of a *nom de plume*, should be masquerading under a fragment of his own patronymic. He felt just a little bit ashamed of himself, and heartily wished he could make a dignified retreat out of a situation so embarrassing to a gentleman of such honest convictions.

"I hope you will see my uncle before you go away from the inn," said Madge. "I should like you to know him; he is a publisher."

"Thank you, Miss Weston. Since he is your uncle and Dick's it would be a pleasure for me to know him."

Anthony fancied, though, that it was far less desirable that he should make the acquaintance

of Miss Weston's uncle as publisher. He thought of a certain publishing firm of the name of Weston who rejoiced in encumbering the reading world with a copious supply of very fourth-rate fiction. He would not see his work published by such a firm at any price, even if he had not already found a publisher to his taste. It was very plain to him that Uncle Ralph could be none other than the head of the firm in question, and he could not risk hurting Miss Weston's feelings by any discussion of their demerits as publishers. So he quickly led the conversation from so awkward a topic, and resolved that he would gently but firmly change the subject whenever it should chance to concern itself with Uncle Ralph.

"Hsh! Let us go softly, there is a blackcap singing in that big may tree," said Madge, with uplifted finger, as they walked on.

The big may tree grew in the hedge, and dropped its pale petals half into the orchard and half into the field without.

"Are these all apple trees here?" asked Anthony presently.

"Not all. See, there are cherries, pears and plums,

and a couple of quinces at the farther end. When Whindles was a farm I am afraid the orchard was neglected, there were so many old trees. When Uncle Ralph took it he had all the useless trees removed and young ones planted instead; he introduced the wall fruit, and the grass has been cared for. The young trees have all grown up now; but are not the old ones jolly, and gnarled? I don't think an orchard is perfect unless it has grass growing between the trees, do you?"

"No, I don't," agreed Anthony; "without grass it is only a market garden. But this——" He paused.

"Yes, this?" she queried.

"*Is* perfect," he answered, though he knew not whether he really spoke of the orchard or of her upturned face.

"Ah, you should see it in April, when the daffodils come out, and the west wind sets them all dancing in the grass. I planted them myself. Don't you see their green spears now?"

And there they were, the slender spears of the grass and the greater spears of the daffodils—an undaunted array of green, an army of the spring folk that had found a place for themselves in the land of summer.

"There's James worrying himself to a skeleton over those birds," laughed Madge, as they passed towards the house.

He was clapping his hands and shouting vehemently—

"Hi! Be off, there! Be off! Sh—! Be off, there, you——"

The last word, whatever it may have been, was lost in renewed shouting. The birds appeared to mind it but little, and gaily busied themselves among the remaining apple blossom, making a little shower of pink petals with each flutter of their wings.

"Whenever he can spare a minute he comes out to scare those poor birds," explained Madge, whose sympathies were evidently not on the side of law and order.

"James," she said, when they came up to him, "will you pull some lettuce for tea, please? I will stay to frighten the birds, if you like."

James smiled and shook his head.

"I don't think you could frighten anything, Miss Madge," he said, with easy familiarity. "They be little skeared at the noise *I* make, so I don't s'pose they'd mind you. They be as thick as thieves,

sir," he added to Anthony. "Just you look at 'en now?"

The sight was too much for him, and he renewed his shouting.

"Let me try," said Madge, clapping her hands.

"There, miss, I said they wouldn't go for you," grinned James triumphantly.

And they did not go; but there was a swift fluttering of soft wings, brown and grey and white, in the sunlight, and the doves came all about Madge, responsive to that light clapping of her hands.

"Oh, you dear things; its tea-time, is it?" she said. "Come along then!"

And they went on towards the house; she with a dove on each shoulder and the rest of them about her on the pathway, and Anthony following close, doing homage with his eyes.

"You have been a long time," was Amy's comment when they rejoined her. "Have you been learning the garden by heart?"

Anthony was inclined to think he had.

"Miss Weston has been reading me a timely homily on the evils of idleness," he explained.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madge in a tone of mild reproof.

Amy shook her head.

"I never knew Madge try to reform anyone yet," she said.

Anthony laughed.

"Surely it is unlikely that any friend of Miss Weston's should need reforming. As for myself, if she tries to take so hopeless a vagabond in hand I trust her efforts will meet with the success they would deserve."

"I am not going to try," said Madge. "I think I prefer you unreformed," which may be understood to imply that the best women always prefer the man who has a touch of "devil" in his composition. Anthony was pleased to remember that candid remark for many a long day.

Presently tea was served in the garden, the lop-sided Moses making a willing fourth. Out of doors no meal was considered quite complete without him, and with the sagacity common to his breed he had discovered that fact, and always made the most of it.

"Moses reminds me of a sailor," Anthony remarked; "he looks as though he had always beaten up to windward."

Madge explained that Moses became lop-sided

through continually watching his mistress out of the corner of his left eye. It would seem that luxury and not hardship had developed him some what unevenly.

"I don't think I will propose a toast this time," remarked Anthony, as he emptied his cup when tea was nearly finished. "The last one I did propose returned upon my own devoted head in a most uncompromising manner."

"You should not have been so ungallant," returned Amy.

"Yet the 'merry meeting' has followed, and it is worth half a dozen wettings," said Anthony with fervour.

"Is it?" replied Madge. "Then I hope you will come to Whindles again during your stay at the inn."

"I hope so too," thought Anthony.

"Come as often as you like," was what her eyes said.

"Have you been to Marple Down yet?" she asked.

"No, I am thinking of going there to-morrow." Anthony's reply was downright inspiration, for he had not the slightest idea of going to Marple Down on the morrow until Madge's question.

"Oh, are you? Amy and I are also going there to-morrow," answered Madge, with commendable readiness.

"Are we?" said Amy to herself, lifting her brows ever so slightly. Oddly enough, this was the first she had heard of going to Marple Down, for Madge, like Anthony, had had as it were an inspiration.

Of course there was only one thing for Anthony to do.

"Perhaps, instead of going alone, I may have the pleasure of going with you, Miss Weston," he said.

"We should be pleased to have you with us, if you care to come; it will be great fun to go together. I should like to be the first to show you the view from the top of the down."

So it was arranged that Anthony should meet them upon the morrow between Wainford and the inn. But Amy maintained a discreet silence.

It was well after eight o'clock when Anthony made his way back to the inn. Madge showed him a pathway across the fields, so he left Whindles by the little gate that joined the garden and the meadow.

"Till our next merry meeting," laughed Madge, "and mind you do not oversleep in the morning."

"I will be up with the lark," Anthony protested. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Madge watched him go a short way, and once he turned and waved his hand to her, then she went slowly towards the house. In the soft twilight her cheeks were rosy, and it was not only for the sweetness of the bean flowers with the dew upon them that she drew a full, happy breath.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH, BEING A SHORT ONE, IS OF THE NATURE OF AN INTERLUDE.

PASSING through the kitchen, Madge lingered to instruct Becky as to certain things which would be required for the morrow. She was careful to impress upon her that there must be sufficient provender for three people. Which fact caused the worthy Becky to put two and two together, as they say, and as most country people will do; and she certainly made four of it.

"I wash my hands of all responsibility concerning you," said Amy, when Madge came into the room where the former was sitting.

"When had you any responsibility?" asked Madge.

"A pretty tale I shall have for Uncle Ralph," the other continued, nodding her head.

Madge smiled sweetly.

"Don't you think it would be nice to have tea at Mrs. Penfold's to-morrow?" she asked.

"I should think it would be very pleasant—for Mr. Lane."

"What about you?"

"Oh, I shall probably have a quiet time here with Becky."

There was a suggestive pause.

"You surely don't mean that you are not going to Marple Down with us to-morrow?"

"That is just what I do mean." Amy felt that the laugh was on her side, and she made the most of it. "You should not make such elaborate arrangements for other people without consulting them first. And I am going to rebel. It was really delightful the way you told Mr. Lane that *we* were going to Marple Down to-morrow, when we had not even thought of such a thing."

"But I thought of it all at once."

"And I made up my mind to do nothing of the sort. There, are you not nicely sold?"

"I am afraid I am," murmured Madge. "Oh, you must come, Amy," she said, putting her arms round her friend's shoulders.

But Amy was firm.

"No! You should not be so rash as to suppose I want to be hauled to the top of Marple Down."

"But *I* want to go," said Madge decisively.

"Then you probably will go," returned Amy.

Evidently that was what Madge thought too.

"I know," she said. "I must have a day's sketching."

"Yes! and take nothing but eatables in your paint box," laughed Amy. "There, I knew that any punishment I might arrange for you would be wasted. But I am glad you have sufficient respect for the proprieties to call it sketching."

Meanwhile Anthony was making his way across the fields in the radiant twilight. Northward the sky was palest green, clear and luminous; but higher, and westward, the green warmed into gold and amber; and higher yet the gold deepened into rose and purple; and where the sky was neither all of the gold nor all of the purple there hung a feathery wisp of light cloud like a winged glory, over Whindles, as it seemed.

For Anthony the night as it deepened was enchanted. A brook bubbling at the edge of a field set his thoughts to meadow-music, and on it they passed into the still air. His heel crushed the peppermint on the runnel's brink, and the fragrance of it mingled with the dew coolness. How

sweet the night! How full of promise for the morrow!

A big May-beetle boomed up against his face, startling him, but he only laughed aloud. It was a denizen of the woods gone astray under the stars, who greeted him brotherwise. In the copse a cuckoo was calling, calling like a clock o' the woods sounding the minutes to the calm passage of a star over the tree-tops.

Anthony felt strangely happy. And had he inquired of himself, he would have acknowledged that Madge alone had made the day what it had been for him. She was inevitably part of the glad sunshine of that, as yet, unsurpassed day.

In his ardent imagination he saw himself as her lover leading her forth into the fields, the whole world a garden beneath their leisured feet. He saw her face warmed into richer beauty, a more womanly loveliness, by such divine passion as the nightingale over in the coppice poured forth so exquisitely in haunting music.

Could he be the chosen one? The thought made his pulses tingle. He had a keen desire to go back to Whindles, to have speech with her again. Perchance to bring her out into the singing spaces of

the night, wherein Nature ever weaves her magic for all who enter her vast sanctuary; but most of all for those who see with other eyes besides their own, who in the mating of their true hearts possess the key to all there is of wonder and mystery in the great heart of the earth.

Yet his sense of humour—never very far away—gave him the laugh again. He laughed at himself for a great eager boy; he told himself it was folly—though very sweet folly withal.

He felt unwilling to leave the fields. He could have gone on walking for miles by the fragrant hedges, over the hushed meadows, until the very calm beauty of the night compelled a more measured and deeper music than that which lilted and rioted in his heart. It is not until a man realises a great love that the deep music of his soul is unfettered, and wells up to flood the whole of his being. And Anthony had not as yet that realisation, though he was nearer the threshold of the house of fulfilment than he was aware.

What need was there for haste? the night was all his own. So it took him a long time to get within sight of "The Traveller's Joy," but when he drew near thereto it was with quickened steps and

a feeling of content, for it had begun to be very homelike to him.

"I have been to Whindles," he said, with an air of triumph, after greeting William and his wife.

There was a humorous look of mutual understanding.

"Oh, have ye, sir," said Mrs. Hodges. "'Tis a nice place, isn't it?"

"Yes, very nice. And I find that Miss Weston is the sister of an old college chum of mine."

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Hodges. "I doubt if Miss Weston would have gone off in such a hurry the other morning if she had known that."

"No, I suppose not," laughed Anthony; "but to-day she made up for treating me so badly," and forthwith he told them how he had been tumbled into the river and had spent the rest of the day drying himself.

"Then you haven't explored much of the country to-day, sir," Mrs. Hodges said.

Anthony was obliged to admit that he had not.

"I want to go to bed soon, Mrs. Hodges, because I must be sure of getting up early; but first I must write a letter. We are going to Marple Down to-morrow," he explained.

Both William and his wife grasped the extent of that "we," and after Anthony had gone upstairs the latter endeavoured to persuade William that certain things would work out exactly as her feminine intuition indicated.

That letter of Anthony's was a very important one: it was to his publishers, asking that copies of two of his books, the best of them as he judged, might be sent on to him immediately.

He intended to give them to Madge. That seemed to him the best means of making known to her who and what he really was. He was enjoying the situation, but it had obvious drawbacks, and whenever he met Madge's clear eyes he felt the twinge of an honest man playing a double game somewhat against his will. Besides, *Mr. Penrose* could not be entirely left out of the question; and it was desirable, if his acquaintance with Madge was to develop as he hoped it would do, that Anthony should make known his identity as speedily as may be. Though he decided not to do so until he had received his books. They would be his credentials. He was sure to receive them in three or four days at the latest. Meanwhile Mr. Lane would continue his sojourn in this most delectable country. So hey-ho for the morrow!

CHAPTER IX.

WHICH TELLS HOW OUR TRAVELLER WAS TAKEN TO MARPLE DOWN.

OF course Anthony did not oversleep on the morrow! The only difficulty was to know what to do with the time between breakfast and the hour for setting out. As it was, he started earlier than might be considered necessary, and met Madge much nearer Wainford than she expected.

He waved his cap when he saw her coming along the road, and she waved her hand in response. Anthony was surprised and not a little pleased to see that she was alone.

"Where, then, is Miss Warren?" he inquired after they had exchanged greetings.

"Oh, she—thought she would not come."

"What, after you had arranged the day's outing?"

"Yes," this somewhat demurely.

"Not because I was included in the party, I hope," said Anthony, with some anxiety.

"Oh, no! Amy told me last night that she

would stay at home, so I had to arrange a day's sketching."

"I see," said Anthony, who really thought he did see; "hence the paint-box. You must let me carry it, please; artist's materials are always heavy."

The box which Madge had brought was a lacquered tin one, long in shape and capacious enough to hold sufficient paint for half Burlington House. But it was not so heavy as Anthony had expected to find.

That he should forget to express any regret over Miss Warren's defection was quite pardonable under the circumstances.

"The day is perfect for the hills," said Madge.

Anthony thought the day perfect for whatever might chance. Indeed, it was as fair a summer morn as one could wish, with a light wind from the east and a sky not utterly cloudless.

"Isn't it good to be off early, the whole day before us?" said Madge, as they turned up the lane where only three days before Anthony had hoped to find Whindles.

"Yes, it is," he responded. "Sometimes when I have been on a tramp I have started from the

inn before six o'clock, and have covered six or seven miles by breakfast-time. I feel then that I could go on all day and never tire."

"Dear me, what energy!" laughed Madge. "You must not think that we are going to do nothing but walk all to-day, although I am taking you the longer way to Marple Down."

"I don't mind that," put in Anthony, who would have walked willingly enough had Marple Down been at the other end of the county.

"I wanted to go over the common and across the meadows instead of by the road," Madge explained. "You will not mind forsaking your precious road for a little while, I am sure."

Anthony would have forsaken any road in the kingdom for such a smile.

"You must not think because I extol the road that I care for nothing else," he returned. "On the contrary, I love the fields and the commons no less. And when the dust is blown about, and the road is white and stinging, then give me a meadow or a path between the wheat."

A cart-track turning off from the lane led them upwards over a stretch of heathery common, where the young bracken was unfolding among the dwindling

furze-bloom. The pine-tops showed above a sandy dip.

"You know Stevenson's *Vagabond*, I suppose?" queried Anthony.

"No, I do not."

"Oh!" Anthony squared his shoulders, lifted his head a little higher, and quickened his steps to the rhythm—

"Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above
And the by-way nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see
Bread I dip in the river—
There's the life for a man like me,
There's the life for ever.

"Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around
And the road before me.
Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above
And the road below me."

He mouthed it finely, with a toss of the head here and there; then he repeated the first stanza at Madge's request.

"That seems to sing its way into one's blood."

"I know," said Madge; "it is like hearing the lilt of a dance and having hard work to keep one's feet firm upon the ground."

"That is it," replied Anthony, "and there *is* a lilt or rhythm of the road, whether it be the rumble of a wagon or the clear beat of a horse's hoofs, the slow movement of a herd of cows daintily stepping, or the mere sound of a man walking."

"There must be a rhythm of life too, I think," said Madge.

"Yes, and the old Greeks knew it when they glorified the dance and made it part of their religion. Poetry, which interprets life, is instinct with it, and even nowadays most children have still the sense of it."

"'Bed in the bush with stars to see,'" Madge mused aloud. "Have you tried that?"

"Yes, I have slept out o' nights with the stars over me," Anthony told her. "It is very strange and beautiful to wake in the middle of a summer night to see the stars glimmering over one; to hear the little movements—half noise, half silence—of things that stir in the dark; then to watch the creeping dawn and the sun rising on a world silver-wet with dew. One does not sleep over much, though."

"I don't think I should want to sleep at all," said Madge.

A kestrel rose from the bushes near them.

"Look!" exclaimed Madge. "There's a windhover!"

They both watched it circle higher and higher, then drop down the breeze and hang motionless above a distant wood.

"It will drop in a moment," said Madge.

But no. It neared them, and took a sudden curve upwards, tilting itself against the wind, and began to circle again. Then it hovered, poised on wide-spread wings, alert and watchful.

"Look, it's hovering!" said Madge.

Anthony watched it, fascinated. Suddenly it swooped down with incredible swiftness, and was away ere it seemed to have reached the ground.

"I could feel the air rushing past me as I watched it," said Anthony. "What was it you called it?" he added.

"A *windhover*. Haven't you heard that name before? It is a kestrel really."

"I did not know that even," acknowledged Anthony. "Windhover;" he repeated the name

as though to get at its full significance. "Windhover. It is admirable, the bird itself. I suppose it is a local name?"

"I don't know; it is the one I always use."

"There is often something akin to poetry in the old folk-names. It is because they take one closer to the heart and life of things, I suppose."

"Do you think poetry does that?" asked Madge, finding Anthony vastly interesting.

"Yes, I do. Poetry—if it be such—must ever bring us into touch with life itself. It must be something living that awakens into response the life which is in ourselves, kindling us to finer and grander emotions, to a more enduring honour, a livelier joy, a more ardent and a surer sympathy."

"Yes," said Madge, as though she wanted him to go on.

"And where life is there also is beauty; therefore poetry must ever shape itself towards the utmost beauty of form; for of the fire within is the vessel which bears the flame wrought wondrously."

"But the folk-names for flowers and animals are sometimes ugly. Can there be anything ugly in poetry?"

Anthony paused a moment before he answered her question.

"Yes, I think so," he said slowly, with the air of one whose mind had convinced him against his will. "There are in great poetry certain forms of elemental ugliness—the ugliness of hatred, of betrayal, of base passion, of ambition—which are wrought by the hand of genius into the grandeur of the whole conception. Iago, Caliban, Lady Macbeth, for example, are they not ugly in their passions and deceits? Yet *Othello*, *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* have no uncertain place in the great poetry of the world. There is a greatness about them which may be said to lift them above mere beauty."

"Yet surely there can be nothing higher than beauty," persisted Madge.

"In Nature, no; but in the complexity of human life I think there may be," replied Anthony. "Yet, perhaps if we could see rightly we should discover after all that in beauty lay the clue to life's meaning and the solution of its mysteries. Beauty of form, beauty of dress, beauty of conduct, what are they but health and strength, simplicity and goodness?'

They skirted the pine wood and dipped into

a sandy hollow of heath and bracken, then up again with an orchard below them, and at last they were on the edge of a sand pit, with Marple Down before them, like a great monarch over his vassals the fields, and at their feet the road northward from the sea.

Of course, the road goes southward too; but here one only thinks of it going away into the heart of the country, over the distant hills, and then—but perhaps if one were exiled in that strange, busy London the road would seem only to lead southwards, and home.

The big hill dominated the view; the sheer bluff of the red quarry above which they stood made it loom up grandly in the sunlight.

"Isn't it splendid!" said Madge.

"It is. And what a fine splash of colour this red sand makes! Are those birds playing at rabbits?"

"No!" laughed Madge, "they are sand-martins, who have just set up housekeeping for the summer. They are not quite so beautiful as their cousins the swallows, are they?"

"But they are none the less gay for that, I am thinking," returned Anthony.

"Oh, everything is gay out of doors to-day!

Come along!" And Madge ran down the pathway with Anthony after her, nor did they stop until they came, breathless, to the gate by the roadside.

"Now don't you want to be off on the road?" queried Madge, as the gate swung to behind them.

Anthony paused and looked both ways of the road, then at his companion.

"No, I want nothing better than Marple Down to-day." "With you," he might have added, but forbore.

"That was very nicely said," quoth Madge, not knowing what he left unsaid, though she may have guessed it.

"One must speak the truth even though it be pleasant," returned Anthony.

Madge led the way through a farm, and from thence there was nothing but the fields between them and the hills save another road hidden between the hedgerows. The grass was deep, and the breeze rippled it into silver and purple and pale lavender under the sun. There was clover all abloom and white campions—"milkmaids," as Madge would have them—and great moon-daisies. The sorrel gleamed red as wine, spilling a ruddy stain over the meadow, sunwards.

As they went, joyous with the warmth of summer, body and spirit they gave themselves up to the instinct of the earth's delight. To Anthony summer became an intoxication no less than to Madge.

"I feel that I could take the whole earth in my arms, I love it so," she said.

She became eyes to Anthony for things he would have passed unseeing. She showed him the way a field dipped into the coppice where the day shimmered towards high noon; there a roof of red tiles half-covered with lichen of marvellous yellow gold; there the tall Lombardy poplars, which marked the way of the road, standing like green sentinels of summer.

She bade him hearken where the brook shallowed into a little tinkling song by the rushes, where the meadow-sweet would soon blossom. Finding him vastly ignorant, she named the flowers for him, as one who loved them, and to whom botany was something more than a science. There were the common purple orchis and the butterfly orchis, the scarlet pimpernel in a corner by the wheat, and purple tares. Milky-sweet and white were the guelder-roses on the hedge by the stile; and below

them, where the grass was greenest, there grew a cluster of dainty blue blossoms. These, as Madge explained, are of all flowers the most fortunate; for are they not called bird's-eye and speedwell and veronica—three names each so beautiful and so dear that it matters not which is used?

The common things of the fields and hedges—the vetches, the lychnis, the wild parsley, the yellow rattle, the very grasses, all these she named for him, until he was well-nigh bewildered to know so much and ashamed to know so little.

For these things Anthony had eyes that were eager indeed, but ever would his glance come back to his companion's face, as though therein was the sum of the beauty of the day, even as the gladness of summer was in her voice.

They reached the foot of the hills, and rested awhile in a green beechen glade. Above them the big hill kept guard. Very great and steep it looked, and Anthony eyed it as though he would go straight up the side there and then.

"It is going to be warm work this morning," he said.

"Oh, I am not going to ask you to climb right up there," said Madge. "We go along the lane,

and then to the top of the hill by a path that winds up and up through the trees."

"That sounds inviting; I like going 'up and up.'"

The lane, still sweet with the hawthorn blossom, went past hazel thickets, with the ragged-robins growing on the edge and pink bachelor's-buttons. And above it the hill towered always.

The hedges were hung with a long trailing plant that had little starry flowers, pale green set among beautifully-shaped leaves.

Anthony pulled a piece and gave it to Madge.

"There is some traveller's-joy for you, Miss Weston," he said, sure of the name of one plant at least—so he thought.

"But that is not traveller's-joy; it is bryony," explained Madge.

Anthony looked rueful.

"The traveller's-joy comes out later," Madge continued. "They are very much alike until you see them together, and I think the bryony is quite as beautiful as the other, except in name." And forthwith she took off her big hat and trimmed it round with the green sprays, while the sun made golden meshes of her hair and the wind fanned it against her brows.

"There, that will do," she said, eyeing her handiwork with feminine satisfaction. And Anthony, watching her, was content.

When they came to the end of the lane, Madge stopped at the gate of a cottage garden.

"I am going to ask Mrs. Penfold if she will get some tea for us. Do you mind waiting a minute or two?" she said.

She went up to the cottage, leaving Anthony to lean over the gate and admire the homely old place, with its big well and warm-coloured tiles. There was a trail of pink monthly roses over the door.

Madge did not keep him waiting long, and they turned to the right by the cottage and began to go up the hill by a chalky road, their faces toward the beech wood that hung on the side of the downs.

"There is some traveller's-joy," said Madge, gathering a spray from the hedge, "or it will be when the flower comes. It has a different leaf from the bryony, you see."

Anthony took the little green spray from her hands and kept it. Before it had faded he secreted it in a little book which he carried in his pocket.

I believe it is in that book now, and at the page where it lies securely is the song of one who sang—

> "If love were what the rose is,
> And I were like the leaf,
> Our lives would grow together
> In sad or singing weather,
> Blown fields or flowerful closes,
> Green pleasure or grey grief:
> If love were what the rose is,
> And I were like the leaf."

The path wound up the hillside, and as they went deeper into the trees the wind sang about them in the dancing leaves, and the sunlight lay dappled on the brown of fallen autumns. The beeches were like great and beautiful ferns, so dainty was the pale green foliage above the dark, smooth trunks; the leaves seemed to belong to the pure colour of the sky.

Anthony gave Madge his hand, for the path was broken in places, and they went thus through the soft green light, with now and then a glimpse of fields below them.

"Oh, the trees! the trees!" exclaimed Anthony, breathing mightily.

"How the leaves hold the sunlight!" said Madge, looking upwards.

"I sometimes think that forest-craft must be the highest form of religion there is," Anthony said a minute later, when they paused to look back over the way they had come.

"Religion?" queried Madge, puzzled for the moment.

"Yes! Religion is the life of every day transfigured by high emotion, until there is nothing common in the whole life of the world. And they whose work takes them into the woods must get very near to the beauty which spiritualises everything it touches."

"I think I know what you mean," said Madge. "It is the same thing that makes me want to go on tiptoe when I am in the woods lest I should spoil the stillness; that fills me with praise when a blackbird sings. But many of the country people are so different; they seem to care so little for the trees or the flowers or the fields, and have but little welcome for the birds. They grow up apathetic, and if they gain knowledge they have not love."

"But don't you find that country folk are better, on the whole, than the town people?" said Anthony.

"Yes, I do. It is what they might be but are not, rather than what they are, which seems so pitiful.

Yet with the beauty of the fields and the woods about them, with the clean air and the sunshine, their possibilities are boundless. Of course their work is often very trying, and they get old so quickly; but it is their apathy rather than their labour which is a barrier between them and the best things of life. It does not seem right, does it?"

"No, it doesn't," responded Anthony. "But surely they are not all alike?"

"Oh, no; there are some so intelligent and shrewd that it is a pleasure to be with them. I learned much of my country lore from a keeper and from an old woodman; it is part of their business to see things, and, seeing, they learn to care more for the life around them."

"Instead of going the right way about it, and learning to see things because they love them," put in Anthony.

"Yes; but wouldn't you think that to live in such country as this would be to love it?" returned the other thoughtfully. "Is it only a question of education, I wonder?"

"I think so," replied Anthony. "Education, in that wider sense of the word, that will evolve a more finely-tempered and responsive humanity

altogether. The spirit of the woods is only there for those who respond to it."

"Must the best and most beautiful things of life always be only for the few?" asked Madge, looking up between the rustling beech leaves into the intense blue of the sky beyond.

"Not always, I think," replied Anthony quietly.

For a little while they climbed in silence, each seeing in the other a new light of the mind, a flash of the soul hitherto unexpected, Anthony in particular pondering on the seriousness he had surprised in his companion.

"Now we are on the edge of Downland," said Madge, when they stood at last on the short turf above the trees.

East and west the rolling downs spread, hill beyond hill of sunny green, to the very limit of sight. Only two valleys that ran southward showed two shining spaces of sea. Behind them, where the top of the hill was still to be attained, there seemed but the sky beyond the curve of the down —an illimitable blue with white clouds sailing in it.

It was a different world from the lowlands—a world vaster and more solemn, whose only limit is the sky and the sea, and by night the stars; a

world of clearer sound, yet of a silence almost tangible, shaped as it were by the thinnest waves of vibrant atmosphere; a world of more delicate colour, of greater wonder of sunlight and cloud, and of ever moving air; a world finer sensed, perhaps, for being near the sky.

They rested on the turf, Anthony stretched at full length upon his back, with his head in the sky, as he aptly expressed it.

"It does seem but a step from Downland to the sky," said Madge. "Over that ridge, and there you are on that white cloud."

"What fine turf this is!" remarked Anthony.

"Yes, it is excellent for walking on; I believe you would even forsake your road for it if you lived near by."

"It is certainly excellent for being lazy upon," Anthony responded as he rolled over and buried his face in a fragrant bed of wild thyme. Then he sprang to his feet, virile and alert, and stretched his arms, facing the wind which came from somewhere under the sun, full of the pungent sweetness of the downs. And as Madge watched him her eyes smiled, because she found him good to look upon.

They went easily upwards, keeping within the curve of the hill, to the side of the clump of beeches that is a landmark for many miles, seeing nothing but downs and sky as they went. Then suddenly the hill seemed to fall away before them, and in the space of three steps they saw—field beyond field and wood beyond wood—a world that lay stretched at their feet.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH TELLS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, OF THE HILLS AND OF HOW THE DAY ENDED.

ANTHONY drew a quick, eager breath, that sudden expansion of their horizon was so unexpected.

"It is wonderful!" he said.

The physical exertion of climbing to the top of the downs prepares one for great breaths of tonic air. On a summer day it is as though one breathed blue sky and sunshine, with some matchless quality of the good green hills added.

And should you look forth over the wide country below, you will feel that something of the strength and greatness of the hills has entered into you, something spacious of the earth and sky. That range of vision will refresh and invigorate you; it will give new strength to your sight. Thinking perhaps of the Arab who can look upon the face of the sun at noontide with naked eyes unflinching, you will account that a small thing compared with the

breadth of your outlook. Your manhood—or your womanhood, if such it be—will seem a more splendid thing than it was before. There will be nothing petty left within you, if only you have the mind to grow great with the spirit of the hills, and the heart to love them.

There is an exhilaration which comes of merely treading the springy turf and of breathing such clean and pungent air. The downs set a fine edge on the perceptions; and one feels joyous, tireless as the larks that sing all day long over the uplands. Anthony felt that now: it *was* wonderful.

"I think it must be splendid to have wings," he said, conscious of a subtle feeling of poise.

Madge was fully satisfied now. She had looked forward to this view from the top of Marple Down as the crowning-point of their excursion. She wanted Anthony to realise the wonder of it as she herself did. It did not occur to her that to be glad merely to be alive might seem a strange thing. Blythe and sometimes sweetly serious, she liked to be *herself* without hindrance; but that kept her apart from the more conventional of her fellows, and perhaps took her more directly into the green world which she loved so well; for there were few to whom

she could be herself as unreservedly as she was to Anthony. Without a long acquaintance or understanding, almost without a thought, he was already her comrade, as though they had been children together: that he should see things as she saw them was the most natural thing possible.

They seated themselves near the trees on the edge of the hill, so that they could see all that lay below them—the fields and the woods shimmering in the summer haze, with the roads showing like threads between them, and, beyond, the line of far hills blue and dim under a splendour of white-topped clouds which the dropping wind had piled up on the edge of the sky.

"Look!" said Madge, "there is the sand-pit above which we stood, with the purple pine trees behind and the white road by it; and there are the meadows we came across; and yonder"—here her hand took a wider sweep—"are the Surrey hills."

"Those beasts look like insects rather than cows that have attained to years of discretion," remarked Anthony, his eyes on a field at the foot of the hill, which seemed no bigger than a square of green cloth with a border of darker shade.

Madge laughed.

"The height does make everything appear small down there, doesn't it?"

"It makes one feel very big, up here," said he, throwing back his head.

By and by Madge began to unfasten the tin box of "artist's materials."

"What are you going to paint?" began Anthony. "Oh!——"

There was a pause, and then he went off into a fit of laughter; for when the box was opened it revealed, not paints and brushes, but dainty cakes and sandwiches of lettuce and cucumber, honey and sweet home-made bread, a jar of cream and some cheese.

"So this is how you go sketching, is it?" he bantered. "I thought that box was wonderfully light for artist's materials."

"I only use water-colours," explained Madge; "but that is really a large colour box which I always use for this other purpose. Poor thing, it must feel sadly degenerate. Did you think I meant to do some sketching to-day? To watch anyone painting is very tedious work."

Madge looked very roguish.

Anthony thought he would be willing enough to

try it; he fancied he would not find it tedious to watch *her*.

Dinner on the hill-top with a white napkin spread on the turf and with half a county at one's feet is a very delightful affair. Anthony's own opinion, unexpressed, was that it was the most delightful meal he had ever had. Was not the bread of Becky's best baking, and had not Madge herself made the cakes? Everything was delicious to Anthony's appreciative palate, lover of simple fare that he was.

After dinner they walked along the hill, westward, and looked down the valley that went seawards, with a windmill at the farthest end of the opposite ridge; then they scrambled down into the hollows between the hills, where the junipers grew among the furze, and where the stone-chat and the linnet dwell. The bees hummed over the thyme, and a pair of stone-chats, anxious at first, fluttered about them from bush to bush, uttering their strange "Chack! chack!" But it was very still in the sunshine, with the hills to shut out the world, and only the sun to see.

"There are many happy valleys in Downland," said Madge, "where one could lie all day and dream in the sun."

"Is this a happy valley?" queried Anthony.

"What do you think?" she asked him.

"I think it is," he responded.

They were sitting on the turf again, and he took from his pocket a small green volume, and began to read aloud:—

"'I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty; the air touched me and gave me something of itself. I spoke to the sea: though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean; I desired to have its strength, its mystery and glory. Then I addressed the sun, desiring the soul equivalent of his light and brilliance, his endurance and unwearied race. I turned to the blue heaven over, gazing into its depth, inhaling its exquisite colour and sweetness. The rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky drew my soul towards it, and there it rested, for pure colour is rest of heart. By all these I prayed; I felt an emotion of soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no

other. . . . Then, returning, I prayed by the sweet thyme, whose little flowers I touched with my hand; by the slender grass, by the crumble of dry chalky earth I took up and let fall through my fingers. Touching the crumble of earth, the blade of grass, the thyme flower; breathing the earth-encircling air, thinking of the sea and the sky, holding out my hand for the sunbeams to touch it, prone on the sward in token of deep reverence, thus I prayed that I might touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity.'"*

There was a pause when Anthony finished reading.

"What a beautiful passage!" said Madge. "Whose is it?"

"That is by one whose life was more than usually sad, who loved the earth and the life of it as perhaps never man loved it before, so passionately and reverently and gladly. In the broad sense of the term he was a poet, and something of a prophet besides—Richard Jefferies. Do you know him?"

"Yes; I have two of his books," Madge replied. "*The Pageant of Summer* is in one. I never tire of that; it fills me with a kind of rapture. It is

* From *The Story of My Heart.*

all true of the country about here, too. May I see that book?" she added.

Anthony handed it to her.

"It is *The Open Road: a little book for Wayfarers*, as it modestly calls itself. I often carry it about with me. It is a sort of vagabond's missal, indispensable to all wayfarers and earth-lovers."

Madge turned to the title-page.

"Ah, I like that!" she exclaimed.

"What is that?" asked Anthony.

"'Life is sweet, brother. . . . There's day and night, brother, both sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath.'"

She read it aloud in a simple, delightful manner, giving the phrases a quaint musical turn. Then other fragments, too, she read for him as she lighted upon them.

Presently they fell to talking of their favourite books, and again Anthony found himself telling of his own ambition—which had become a very real thing since he had known Madge—and of the work he hoped to accomplish; but he was careful to avoid all reference to Uncle Ralph as publisher.

By and by they climbed to the hill-top again, for

the Sun was gathering gold as he journeyed westward; the turf was covered with dainty blossoms, ruddy gold, touched with vermilion.

"What flower is this?" asked Anthony, plucking one of them.

"That is the bird's-foot trefoil, or 'shoes-and-stockings,' as the children call them."

Anthony thought the latter name was the prettier. What silent coming of fairy footsteps in the dew it suggested! What pattering, elvish dances, when the fairy footgear was doffed and the tiny naked feet twinkled in the moonlit spaces between the blades of grass!

"One could live up here always and grow great," said Anthony, thinking of the world at his feet.

"I should not like to be always up here," replied Madge.

"Why not?" asked he.

Madge pointed downwards to the green country below them.

"I should want to go down and love it," she said, which is perhaps a woman's way of growing great.

Slipping and scrambling, they made their way down the hill, almost straight to the cottage, and finished with a glorious run led by Madge, who

explained that it was really much easier to run than to walk.

Such a pleasant cottage within, Anthony found it, with long windows looking towards the hillside over a field of barley; and upstairs it was white and cool, with a peep of the blue weald in the distance.

Mrs. Penfold was like her cottage, homely, clean, and altogether pleasant, but a little in need of repair.

"Come in, sir, come in," she said cheerfully to Anthony, drying her hands the while.

"How you young people can walk so far gets over me! Why, if I only go into the village I am quite done up; it's my heart, you know."

"How strange that there should be so much ill-health in the country," remarked Anthony, when he and Madge were at tea. He was thinking of Mrs. Penfold's heart.

Madge was thoughtful for a little while.

"Yes, I often think how strange it is," she said. "There are two or three people at Wainford whom I sometimes go to see. Two are women, neither really old, yet both are almost crippled with rheumatism; another is a queer little old thing, dwarfed

and mis-shapen, yet a man; and there is a child who has ailed almost from birth. I wonder why such things should be in the country where everything else is so beautiful."

"What do you think is the cause?" asked Anthony.

"Often it is the poor food, or wrong feeding, or homes which are in a bad condition; sometimes it is the damp, and too hard work, or neglect. But a deal of the mischief is the result of ignorance and of habit; it is 'in the family,' as they say."

There was a wistful look in her eyes as Anthony watched her.

"Again, then, it is education that is wanted," he said.

"Yes," assented Madge, "it is part of what we were saying this morning. Oh, if we could only give them eyes to love the things they see, if we could only make them well and strong and happy. Of course they are happy in their way, but it seems only a very second-hand happiness."

"This is what I mean," she went on. "You are strong and well, and you look it, too, and out here in the country you seem a part of the country. But the country people are also of it; yet what a

difference! The birds, the trees and the flowers are of the summer, without them it would be incomplete; but not so of the life of the people. Summer has never entered into that; they themselves do not express the fullness and the beauty of the earth, or they would be beautiful and healthful, happy always without regret or long sadness." Her eyes shone with her enthusiasm, for she spoke the thoughts which had dwelt in her heart for many a day.

"But it is not always summer even in the country," said Anthony. "My worthy relatives are always vainly trying to impress upon me the impossibility of the country as a dwelling-place—when it rains, for instance."

"They have not lived in it themselves," said Madge, "nor learned to love it. You do not know how beautiful the rain can be in the country."

Then of one accord they laughed, remembering the way the rain had caught them and brought them together when they first saw each other so few days before.

Madge spoke truly. In the town where the rain comes grimy and disheartening upon the slates and the dull walls, what do you know of the beauty of it? Have you seen the rain come in splendour

from the west with the shout of the wind, falling through great spaces of yellow light, passing in weird magnificence over the hills, with the sonorous swish of impetuous conquest? Have you bowed the head before its first fierce onslaught, and then laughed at it, with your face upraised to greet it; and felt your soul washed clean, smitten into vigour, as though something of the high whiteness of sunlit clouds had entered into it? Have you smelled the sea in the rain? or has it brought the smell of spring to you over the fields on some dripping day of winter? or have you lain abed and listened to it pattering on the roof, flung hither and thither before the wind? If you have done none of these things you do not know how beautiful the rain can be in the country.

"What about the winter?" asked Anthony, though he knew well what she would answer.

"That is beautiful, too," she said.

If you have ever stood among the trees when the wind has blown the sky clear, and have seen the stars sparkle like great jewels between the leafless branches, so that you forgot to wish the leaves were there; if you have watched night by night for the rising of Orion, or have seen Sirius

topping the hills in a frosty sky; if you know the mystery of the woods, when the moon rides high and naught but the weird wind stirs in the trees; if you have gone out in a white frosty dawn among silver fields, and have raced down the iron road for very lustiness of life, until the sun has risen like a ball of molten metal, copper-red through the purple mist; if you have faced the keen wind over the frozen fields—the wild north-easter with the bite of coming snow in it—till the blood in you dances, and your cheeks glow, and you want to shout—then you will know why Madge said how beautiful is winter, despite days of pitiless rain and days which seem as though the sun forgot his shining.

"And think of the short days full of work to be done," Madge continued, "and of the long nights with a sweet-smelling wood fire blazing cheerily up the wide chimney, to the wild sound of the wind outside. Oh, I love the country always! It is only in the town that winter is cheerless or unlovely."

She paused, and something of the sunshine that lay beyond the window bade her forget the winter.

"But, oh, the summer!" she said, springing to her feet. "Give me the summer, the summer; I love that best." And to Anthony she seemed a very incarnation of summer as she said that.

The glad day had begun to wane at last, and amid deepening gold the shadows grew long upon the hillside when Madge and Anthony set out along the lane beneath the hill for home. They mounted a spur of the hill that they might look again over the fields below them; then, with faces set sunwards, they began to go gently down towards the hard road which would lead them to the inn.

The wind had gone, and a sweet stillness hung over the world, as though the day had grown calm with the burden of its own joy. Children's voices with laughter in them came up the hillside through the still air, and far below a dog barked. The sounds were strangely clear, for voices travel far on those uplands, but each was only like a pebble tossed into a still pool—one splash and then ripples of silence.

"'Through the green evening quiet in the sun,'" quoted Anthony. "Was it just such an evening as

this that Keats saw, I wonder, when the sun seems to dream the last hour away?"

Madge repeated the quotation softly, while her eyes drank in the green wonder of the world at their feet. It was the music of that day put into one haunting refrain. The joy and gaiety grown too deep for words, the long, happy hours summed up in one low-breathing pause of radiant wonder, and "the green evening quiet in the sun."

They leaned upon a gate and surveyed the wide landscape over a field of yellow clover, which seemed to hold the fragrance of a hundred radiant Junes—some subtle essence strong, invigorating and sweet withal which the great alchemist, Summer, had distilled from the earth itself.

Then the sun dipped down to the distant hills, and they made their way homewards along the road; while over them the gold changed to rose, and the birds sang to a violet sky, as though the last word for that day would be peace.

But when "The Traveller's Joy" had been passed, and when at the gate of Whindles Madge had bidden Anthony farewell, and had gone, it seemed to him as though a door had been shut between summer and the world. Only for a

moment, and then there came to him the joyous knowledge that he loved her, and already in his heart a new day dawned. Summer gone from the world? Nay, it had but just begun.

How the birds sang! How beautiful the twilight over the fields! It seemed to him that he had never known joy or longing before. So the last word for that day was not peace, but love.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH A WEEK PASSES HAPPILY FOR AT LEAST TWO PEOPLE CONCERNED.

TWO days later Anthony called at the post office at Wainford, hoping to find his books waiting for him; but instead of them there was a polite letter from his publishers expressing their regret that, owing to an unforeseen delay, the new edition of the two books in question would not be ready for another week.

Anthony ground his heel into the road. Here was a dilemma! His first impulse was to go on to Whindles—whither it chanced he was bound—and to make a full confession to Madge that he was not Mr. Lane at all. But that plan had obvious drawbacks. Having waited so long without explaining who he was, he felt that it would be absurd to simply state his identity now; the excuse that he was waiting for his books would seem a very lame one if the books themselves were not forthcoming.

The sooner Madge learned who he was the better,

and yet no days had been quite so happy as these which he, as Mr. Lane, had spent in her company. And now he loved her. Irrevocably his life was given to render homage to this one girl. He who had dreamed of loving now knew that great throbbing life which has inspired all literature of love and passion. There was more joy packed into the winged hours of a summer's day with her than all the roads and all the books in the kingdom could have given him. Love had come to him very swiftly; it was incredible—almost—but there was no mistake about it.

A sense of honour forbade that he should speak of his love while Uncle Ralph was away, and so he told himself that there was no reason why he should not let things drift as they were until his books should come, then he could set matters right in the way he had originally intended.

Anthony had plenty of good English common sense, so he tried to solve the problem in true logical manner, weighing *pros* and *cons*. But a lover does not make the clearest of logicians, and he only found himself reasoned into a worse muddle; so he gave it up, and decided for the present to remain Mr. Lane —very much at your service should you by any chance have business at Whindles.

That Anthony should continually find his way to Whindles, and should share in so intimate a manner the life there, seemed quite natural to Madge after that day they had spent together on Marple Down; indeed, she hardly gave it a thought at first, but welcomed him frankly.

To Amy, Anthony's admiration for her friend was evident enough; but Madge accepted his companionship with delight, as being the most natural thing in the world, and she welcomed him as unfeignedly as she would have done had they been children together.

So it came about that no day was quite complete without Anthony. Plans for the following day—which were usually laid over-night—had a way of arranging themselves so that he was always included as a matter of course; and Amy, at least, was clear of any responsibility for them. Madge began to look eagerly for his coming; she would not have been at all surprised had he come before breakfast, as it was usually very early in the forenoon that the graceless Anthony would swing into sight across the fields: to come by the road would have taken fifteen minutes longer.

Hodges told his wife that he reckoned Mr. Lane

thought a "deal o' Whindles." It was certain that "The Traveller's Joy" saw rather less of Anthony than it deserved, though he seemed to be getting very well acquainted with the neighbourhood.

One day was spent on the river, a day of cloudless summer, when the stream seemed to have fallen asleep as it flowed, so evenly it mirrored the sky and the shimmering trees. Amy joined Madge and Anthony, because, as she explained, a little extra work would have a salutary effect upon the latter. He was really developing a fine capacity for idleness.

He rowed for some miles up stream, then they landed and enjoyed a picnic on the bank, and were afterward very merry and blythe-hearted. And the time slipped away unthought of till the afternoon was well wearing; then they went down stream again, as it were, on deep waters of gold that, rippling, bore them softly into the evening.

Another day they drove by way of Oakhurst to a small country town, some sixteen miles away, where in a park near by they visited the splendid ruin of a Tudor mansion. It had one of the finest windows Anthony had ever seen. Silent with admiration, and with reverence for an unforgotten past,

they stood within the great hall, now, alas! open to the sky. But the grandeur had not departed from it, though the birds alone looked out from the mullioned window.

Of what gorgeous spectacles could those old walls tell, of what gay cortège and splendid dance, of what laughter, making the old hall ring, amid the glitter of jewels and the beauty of fair women, the conceits of gallants and courtiers, and the sounds of feasting and revelry! In the imagination the grey walls ring again, the great logs crackle and flare almost up to the oaken roof, and in all its gay colours the pageant of beauty lives again. For these old places are never dead; and at a thought the brave and glorious past resumes its sway.

They sat within the shadow of the grey walls, and roamed unhindered in the park, then late in the afternoon they started homewards. Their road lay through a hilly country of thick woods and breezy commons, with fields set aslope between them; a country even more romantic than that about Wainford. They crossed the river high up, while yet some distance from home, by a fourteenth-century stone bridge, grey and buttressed; a thing of beauty left by the builders of a more leisured age

than this, when, in the dignity and the pleasurableness of their labour, and in the felicity of their minds, men were wont rightly to fashion into beauty the work of their hands.

Sam brought them along leisurely, and not until after sunset, when a yellow light and a splashed sky gave promise of wind, did they arrive at Whindles. And on the morrow, the expected wind having come, blowing the plane trees silver and flecking the river into little freshets, they went on the hills, and returning early to "The Traveller's Joy," made for the second time a merry party thereat.

Thus in summer days and pleasure a week sped away, all too quickly for Anthony, who having taken unto himself the ardour of a lover, would fain have prolonged that time even until the ripening of the wheat.

It was for Nature in her royal mood that Anthony had ready eyes—Nature arrayed in glory of purple and gold; the dweller in high and silent places, whom to seek is loneliness, whom to find is exaltation—the Lady of White Light, unapproachable, save with worship and with a clean heart; her vassals the unfaltering stars. Of her Anthony

knew something, though he was not as yet wholly her servant.

But the more homely and tender aspects of Nature he overlooked; seeing the sky afar off, he missed the flower at his feet. He was no naturalist, and he had a tendency to approach Nature by the way of books; a tendency which his love of the road had only partially corrected. Well as he loved the country, he sometimes cared for it less for its own sake than for the phrase that expressed it; like a painter who sees only pictures in Nature, and whose art must suffer in consequence; for if Nature were naught but pictures, of what use were painters?

With Madge it was otherwise. She loved the earth and the life of it entirely for itself, and that love drew her to seek a more intimate knowledge of all the common and beautiful manifestations of it; so that the flowers became her friends, and she delighted in the ways of the birds and of the forest folk, and in the country life about her, no less than she delighted in the wind, the sunlight, and the free air.

A new understanding, hitherto unrealised in his love of Nature, began to be communicated to Anthony. Learning the secrets of wayside and of

woodland from Madge, his eyes were like a child's for wonder of what they saw. Here was a new delight at his feet, and he received, as it were, his sight at her hands. Perhaps she had unconsciously brought him down from the hill-tops into touch with the living world at his feet, and for him love was of the valley.

When he was not at Whindles he was busy getting all the country lore he could out of William. The latter found Anthony vastly interested in the garden.

"He do ask a lot o' questions," he told his wife; "he be just like a gurt boy. An' he was that pleased on Sunday when I showed him a few things."

Those "few things" of William's were an odd mixture of lore and wisdom, and Anthony carefully stored them in his mind. Like many another reticent countryman, William had gathered a wide store of knowledge. He seemed to know when the weather was for rain or for shine; if wind might be expected or no. He would tell you in the morning how the day would wear; and in the evening how the morning would follow. He could explain how to manage bees, build a decent faggot-stack, or rear a litter of pigs. He would show you

how this tree should be grafted or that one thinned out; and of him you could learn the way to treble your catch of pike, if you do not angle by the book nor scorn unorthodox methods. And, strange to say, William could do each of these things with the same thoroughness with which he made his own cider. The more time Anthony spent in William's company the more surprised he was that a countryman should know so many things and say so little about it.

There came a day when Madge sang about the house—and out of it, too; nor did she stay her singing for many days to come. For somewhere between the sunset and the dawn it came to her that it was for herself that Anthony came so often to Whindles, and it seemed to her that she had never known so joyous a thought.

Who shall measure the sweet, wondering joy of a woman's heart when first she understands that the eyes which look into hers are the eyes of a lover, to whom when love speaks there can be no denial? What tenderness illumines her face! How wonderful everything becomes! Life no longer seems to hold any common thing. Has she met the master of her fate, then what premonitions will be hers, of

days of exquisite joy and almost solemn gladness! Already she sees a path among the stars, already she begins to prepare the bridal chamber of her heart for the great mystery of love and longing, soon to become life itself for her.

Anthony knew not as yet that Madge began to understand, though Amy could have told him many a thing which would have joyed him, had she been so minded. Day by day his passion grew and with it his gladness of heart; and he knew that this love, which set his soul aflame, was no light pleasure for a summer day, but rather was for the whole glory and triumph of his life.

The day before Uncle Ralph's return, James came in from the garden at Whindles, just as the clock chimed ten in an unhastening manner.

"The young man's laate 's morning," he said, mopping his forehead with a very red handkerchief.

"For a very good reason, too," responded his spouse.

"How's that?" he queried. "He's generally pretty well on his time, too," he added with a chuckle.

"The young mistress has gone to meet *him;* been gone this half-hour, and left Miss Amy at home."

Becky seemed inclined to be rather short of speech, as though she resented the fact.

"Oh! . . . 'tis like that, eh?" returned James. "Well, he's a nice young feller, too."

Now Becky was rather of the same opinion concerning Anthony, but it was her clear duty as his superior to contradict her spouse.

"That maybe," she assented with a grunt, "but he isn't half good enough for Miss Madge, you know that."

James eyed her sideways and edged towards the door.

"She would have to go a long way to find a better," he said. "And so would he, for the matter o' that," he added, by way of mollification.

"I should just think he would," retorted Becky; "find a better than our Miss Madge, indeed. If he only got someone half as good it would be as much as he would deserve."

James was on the doorstep by this time; but he felt bound to defend his sex, so he fell back upon formula.

"Well, he's a nice young feller, I say, and a gentleman, if ever there was one."

With that he retreated to the garden, and being

out of range of reply he felt that his victory was unquestioned, his last observation being unanswerable.

Becky was shrewd, but her shrewdness had a vanishing point, and that point was Madge. Nothing was good enough for her young mistress, and whatever she did must be right, such was Becky's firm conviction. But with regard to Anthony, her conviction clashed with her shrewdness.

That she could find out nothing about him was a source of irritation to her. Certainly Hodges, who perhaps ought to know, had expressed the same opinion as James; but then, men were all alike. A friend of Mr. Dick's Anthony might be, but—she shook her head wisely—she didn't know what the master would have to say when he came home, though Miss Madge always did have her own way.

Madge's way at this present moment lay in the direction of "The Traveller's Joy." She wore a dress of some soft creamy-white material, that made her look very radiant, and there were red roses fastened at her breast. She and Anthony were to spend the morning in the pine wood, and afterwards he was to return with her to Whindles.

She met him with glad eyes and cheeks as beautiful

as the roses she wore. He ached to put his arms about her; she thrilled him as they loitered along together. A yellow-hammer flew out from the hedge, and Anthony must needs search for its nest; but it was Madge who found it, a shallow cup of dry grass, deep in the hedge-bottom. A little light-brown bird flung itself up into the air with a burst of shrill song, as though the wind had tossed it sunwards.

"What is that?" said Anthony; but even as he asked the question the little songster had dropped into the hedge again as suddenly as it came.

"That was a white-throat," said Madge. "Wasn't it a shrill, beautiful little song. I am glad you noticed it."

Anthony laughed softly.

"You have given me my eyes," he said. "I thought I knew the country, but now I am beginning to learn otherwise. The more I notice, the more I seem to leave unseen."

They reached the stretch of common where together they had watched the kestrel. Anthony mounted a heathery knoll, and stood gazing over the wide expanse of country. A soft rain that had come in the night had left a few white clouds poised

in the sky, that one might know how very blue and sparkling it was.

"It is more beautiful than ever!" exclaimed Anthony with enthusiasm. He looked down at his companion. "Come up and see," he said, holding out his hand. She smiled up at him, and came. Together they looked out over the heath. "Look!" he said. "Right to those far hills it is blue."

And he knew that it was the near presence of this sweet comrade of the laughing brown eyes that made the world so beautiful for him that day. They went on across the common and entered the pine wood by a sandy track. Very solemn were those dim aisles of pine after the bright sunshine; and their feet fell noiselessly on the path of brown pine-needles. Overhead there was a faint murmur in the tree-tops, like the sound of a very far sea under a frosty moon. Now and again the clear note of a chaffinch would shiver the silence.

Though vast and solemn always, a pine wood, with its pungent, healthful sweetness, seems to have a more human quality than has any other wood, whether it be of oak or of stately beech. One wanders in it expectant of the woodman's cottage, sniffing the air for a smell of a wood fire, ere the blue

smoke is seen stealing up through the dark tree-tops over against the white clouds, to join its big brother the sky. Anthony drew a long eager breath.

"This smell of the pines is like breathing blue sky and white clouds, with something of the sweetness of the earth added. I would rather live in the precincts of a pine wood than anywhere."

"It would be good," said Madge. "I love the pines."

"Just on the edge of one, you know," Anthony continued, "so that I could get all the sunshine and a big glimpse of the open country, with the pines to go to for companionship or for solitude, according to one's mood, and for comfort, for strength, and for content."

"Doesn't that apply to woods of any kind?" asked Madge, who loved every tree.

"More or less, of course, as one loves trees," replied Anthony. "Let me be full of the spirit of all the trees. But give me the beeches for pleasure, and when I am in high mood, that my thoughts may partake of their beauty, and grow lucid in the serenity of their green spaces; give me the oaks for my work, let me wield the axe and grow strong among them; but give me the pines for home."

And to Madge it seemed that he spake the thoughts which had been her own for years.

From the pine wood they suddenly emerged into a green glade that sloped gently down to a sandy hollow, wherein were birch trees daintily shimmering in the breeze with a sound like shaken water, and a great tangle of honeysuckle and bramble and bracken.

"What of the birch?" asked Madge.

"Oh, the birch," said Anthony. "The birch is a fairy, and therefore belongs to childhood and to such days when one can forget their six-and-twenty years."

And he scampered down the sandy track, and, with a shout, leaped over a bush. But Madge was not far behind him; and they both ran, so joyous a thing is it to be something-and-twenty, and to share the earth's gladness and the life of it.

"What a boy you are!" exclaimed Madge, with something more than laughter in her eyes.

"Ah!" said he, "it is good to be young—to feel as though the whole youth of the world sang in one's blood."

He spread his coat and they sat down. They seemed to have found an earthly paradise, shut off

from the rest of the world by the great pine trees and a steep slope of bracken and heather; where one could idle for a day, with only the sun to tell the time by, and only the wind to whisper how the hours sped. It seemed to have the power to give joy to whoever might chance to rest therein, at least so Anthony averred, and he knew; though the love that was in his heart remained unspoken.

"What time does Uncle Ralph come back to-morrow?" he asked sometime later, as they were making their way homewards.

"I am not quite sure," Madge replied, "but not before the afternoon, I expect."

"May I come and make his acquaintance, then?" he asked, choosing to forget how often Madge had spoken of the welcome Uncle Ralph would be sure to give him.

"Yes, of course; you must come, please. Uncle Ralph will be delighted to know you; he is always ready to welcome a chum of Dick's."

Truly the absent Dick was responsible for much of which he knew nothing.

"Hodges is going to Lychcombe Fair to-morrow, so I shall spend a studious day in the garden—

reading Keats under a gooseberry bush, I expect, with Winnie to torment me," said Anthony.

"Winnie seems to have taken a great fancy to you," said Madge, in a tone that indicated entire approval of Winnie's taste.

"Yes," laughed Anthony, "you cannot get a new uncle every day, you know; it makes me feel very ancient."

"Poor Uncle Tony!" sighed Madge.

That evening at Whindles Madge and Anthony played those three remaining games of tennis—and Anthony won.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COZENING OF UNCLE RALPH.

MADGE, with her arms upon the window-sill, stood looking out into the garden.

"Oh, you lazy old Moses!" she said, laughing at Amy's ineffectual efforts to wheedle the said Moses into anything so indecorous and fatiguing as a romp. He merely hammered the ground with his stump of a tail, and settled his nose more comfortably upon his paws.

"Well, Madcap, what new mischief are you planning?" said a jovial voice behind Madge.

Uncle Ralph!" she exclaimed, turning with delight and giving him a hug. "Oh, how jolly! I did not expect you home so early as this."

"Oh, you didn't?" Uncle Ralph pinched her cheek. "But you are not sorry to have your old uncle back again, eh?"

"No, I am not; and you are not sorry to get back again, are you now?"

"Suppose I say I am?"

His eyes twinkled; evidently they two were very fond of one another.

"I wouldn't believe you," she said roguishly.

Hanging on to his arm, she dragged him into the kitchen.

"'Morning, Becky! 'Morning, James!" was Uncle Ralph's breezy greeting.

"Good morning, sir," responded Becky. "Glad to see you home again, sir, I 'm sure."

"'Mornin', sir," added James fugally. "Wonderful fine weather, 't'as been."

"Wonderful, James; it made me want to be back in the garden again. How are the peas, James?"

"A mighty fine show of shuck, sir; but there ain't much in 'em yet. They want more rain, they do, badly."

Amy came running from the garden, and even Moses, having condescended to a display of unwonted energy, barked a welcome.

"Hullo, Amy, how are you? You look well."

"How have these young people been behaving themselves?" Uncle Ralph continued to Becky. 'I hope you haven't let them have their own way too much."

"There's no need for me to *let* them have their

own way. Miss Madge gets it fast enough without that," returned Becky.

"Ho! ho!" laughed Uncle Ralph. "You two shall give me an account of your misdeeds."

"Madge had better begin, then," said Amy.

"Why?"

"I have none."

"I am not so sure about that; there is no telling what mischief you young folks get into when the old man is away."

"I thought Amy was to be responsible for me," suggested Madge.

"What about staying all night at 'The Traveller's Joy,'" went on Uncle Ralph, "and scaring Becky out of her wits? Madge told me all about it in her letter," he added to Amy.

(I am not so sure that Madge did tell him *all* about it.)

"You don't call that a misdeed, do you?" asked Amy demurely.

"What do you call it?" he asked in return.

"Oh, I call it an act of great thoughtfulness. You see, Sam——"

"Yes, I know," laughed Uncle Ralph. "*Sam* didn't like the rain, *Sam* might have got wet, *Sam*

wanted to try a change of quarters, Sam——" he shook his head. "Poor old horse, he has a lot to answer for. I must see into this. Perhaps my friend William can offer some explanation. Come along, let us go and take a look at the garden. He made his way out with Madge on one arm and Amy on the other. "Ah, this is the thing for a jaded old publisher," he said, eyeing it lovingly.

They went through the kitchen garden first, James following respectfully.

"Lettuce looks well, James; there's a good show for beans, too. Humph! Peas could do with some more showers; the strawberries too, though they are none so bad." So Uncle Ralph commented as he went, not without an air of pride. He looked out over the fields. "There will be a fine crop of hay this year," he remarked. "What a beautiful sight it is after the grey streets of London!"

Madge showed a heightened colour. She too was thinking what a beautiful sight it was, and wishing that someone would come to her across those fields, as he had come so often during the past week.

Uncle Ralph walked on leisurely, noting with affectionate comment the changes which a fortnight

had made, for in mid-June a garden grows fast into summer. His roses were his greatest pride.

"That briar was not out when I went away, and now look at it," he said, eyeing the beautiful clusters of a "Lady Penzance" tenderly. "And that 'Crimson Rambler,' and those"—indicating a bush of sweet and delicate teas. "Ah! I must be at work again," he added, rubbing his hands.

Having made his way through his garden from end to end, Uncle Ralph thought it time to feel hungry.

"Suppose we go indoors and see what Becky can find in the way of luncheon for an overworked man of books," he said. "I have had three days in London since I left Mr. Connelly."

To exchange the quiet pleasure of Whindles for the noise and bustle of London for three days at a time, in June too, was more than Uncle Ralph cared for now that his strenuous days were over.

Head of the publishing firm which bore his name, he had ceased to take any very active part in the business, leaving the more arduous portion of the work to his junior partner, and only going to town about once a week to keep in personal touch with their affairs.

"I think it would be as well to see what there is in my bag," he said, when they went indoors.

"Oh, yes, come along!" said Madge, clapping her hands eagerly. There was usually something for her not very far from the top of that bag after Uncle Ralph had been away for a few days.

The two girls stood, one on each side of him, watching him open it. There were gifts for both of them, which brought forth an affectionate hug from Madge and a little scream of delight from Amy. But there was more to follow. Uncle Ralph produced a little brown volume.

"We have just printed a new edition of this," he said, handing it to Madge. "I think it is something you will care for. The author seems to be a country lover."

Madge read the title aloud—

"*The Call of the Road*, by Anthony Lane Penrose."

Something about that name brought the blood to her cheeks, and her hand trembled a little as she opened at the title-page. Amy had come round and was looking over her friend's shoulder.

"Why, there's a portrait," she began, then she stopped.

They both looked at each other in astonishment,

Madge not without confusion. Then Amy laughed.

"A handsome fellow, is he not?" said Uncle Ralph, wondering why Madge was so rosy.

She had not taken her eyes off that book, and seemed scarcely to hear Uncle Ralph.

"Yes, he is," responded Amy. "Is it like him?" she asked innocently.

"I have not met him. Archibald says it is a good portrait, though he had a great difficulty to get Mr. Penrose's consent to publish it."

Madge had somewhat recovered her self-possession.

"I think it is a beautiful face," she said, with decision. "Do you know much about Mr. La—Mr. Penrose, uncle?"

"Not much, only that he is young, of independent means, and seems already to be making a name for himself—at least Messrs. Harford and Company are very pleased to publish his books."

Madge thought the information meagre.

"Has he written anything else?"

"Yes. We publish another book of stray papers, half humorous, half fanciful, with a decided literary flavour. It struck me that he was a young man who knew how to use his legs as well as his pen.

There is also a novel which has just gone into a third edition; it is promising, but he writes a little from the outside of folks at present."

"Is he writing anything now?" persisted Madge, although she knew that *now* Mr. Penrose was probably kicking his heels in the fields somewhere within sight of "The Traveller's Joy."

"Yes, he is at work on another novel," replied Uncle Ralph, wondering a little at Madge's evident curiosity. He very rightly attributed it to that portrait in the forefront of the little volume.

Madge slipped out of the room; she wanted to be alone for a few minutes. Why had not Anthony told her who he was, she wondered. Had he purposely hidden his identity because he knew who she was? That would account for the strange way in which he had avoided any conversation about Uncle Ralph, a fact which she had noted with some surprise.

She went to her bedroom, and looked out of the window over the garden and the fields, across the river to the hills, but nowhere was her world empty of his presence. She felt rosy all over, as though her love for Anthony had suddenly become much greater than it was before.

She could see the corner of the garden where, leaning against the wall, he had told her his ambition. He had not spoken then as one to whom some measure of fame had already come. Her instinct told her that whatever his reason for hiding his identity might be, that reason was above reproach. He was so light-hearted that perhaps he had only done it for fun. She could smile at the thought, and had not she herself said what a boy he was! Yet it hurt her to think that he had left her to discover by accident who he was; he might have told *her* at least, when they had been so much together, and were such good friends.

She opened the little book again, and glanced at several pages. What she read made her very happy. It was something she knew and loved, made more beautiful by his thought of it; there was the open road in it, and the sunlight, the joyousness of the trees, and the windy hills.

"Anthony Lane Penrose," she said over to herself, then laughed almost shyly.

Truly it was a strange development.

Yet what a boy he was, too, in the eyes of this happy-hearted girl, who endowed him with her

own simplicity. She was more than ever eager for Uncle Ralph to know him; but what explanation would Master Penrose have to offer?

Meanwhile Amy was exchanging confidences with Uncle Ralph downstairs.

"What was there so striking about that portrait?" he asked. "Do you know Mr. Penrose, Amy?"

"No, I don't"—this was true enough—"only it was very like a young fellow whom we saw at 'The Traveller's Joy.'"

"So"—Uncle Ralph laughed—"that was why you two were in no hurry to get home, eh? Have you seen him since?"

Amy looked a little shamefaced.

"Yes, he has been here several times.'

Uncle Ralph was really astonished now.

"Humph! Been here has he? What's his name?"

"Mr. Lane," replied Amy. "He was at college with Dick."

Uncle Ralph began to be enlightened, and Amy proceeded to relate the nature of Anthony's first and subsequent visits to Whindles. Uncle Ralph laughed to himself.

He had a shrewd idea who "Mr. Lane" might

be, but he thought it advisable to say nothing to Amy on that point. There were elements of fun in the situation, and no one enjoyed fun more than Uncle Ralph.

"So you young people have been enjoying yourselves finely," he said. "I must see this Mr. Lane. Is he still staying at the inn?"

"Yes, he was last night, and I believe he intends to call to see *you* to-morrow. He is a friend of Dick's, you know," Amy added slyly.

"A friend of Dick's, indeed!" Uncle Ralph laughed. "Look here, Amy, we will have our little secret. You need not tell Madge that I know anything of this Mr. Lane. We will see what she has to say about him."

Amy agreed readily enough. Not only was she awake to the possible humour of the situation, but she felt that she had behaved very virtuously towards Madge in venturing to say anything at all concerning Anthony.

"It is rather a curious coincidence that the name in the book is Anthony *Lane* Penrose, isn't it?" she said.

"Very curious," agreed Uncle Ralph dryly.

He wondered if Amy was as innocent as she

looked; he himself fancied that it was something more than a coincidence.

Madge came into the room announcing in a matter-of-fact way, which did but hide no little perturbation, that lunch was nearly ready.

"You shall have me all to yourselves this afternoon," said Uncle Ralph.

"Where shall we go after lunch?"

Madge's eyes beamed with delight. If there was one thing she enjoyed more than another it was a ramble with Uncle Ralph.

"I know," she said, "let us go to 'The Traveller's Joy,' and have tea there. Hodges will be so pleased to see you."

Uncle Ralph's eyes twinkled mischievously as he glanced at Amy.

"Oh, you think Hodges will be pleased, do you! But would you not rather go on the river?"

"No, it will be just the afternoon for a ramble across the fields, with tea at the inn afterwards. Don't you think so, Amy?"

Amy was not proof against this appeal.

"Yes, I do," she said. "Besides, it will be a good opportunity to thank Mrs. Hodges for looking

after us when we were caught in the rain," she added to Uncle Ralph.

"Very well," said he, "have your own way, as usual. I am sure if Mrs. Hodges did look after you she deserves some thanks, so I will discharge my debt."

"And I mine," said Madge, giving him a kiss.

"There, there," shaking his head, "you know how to get round your old uncle. Be off with you!"

They made merry over the meal. All three were looking forward to the afternoon with some eagerness: Uncle Ralph because he thought the game was playing into his hands, Amy for wonder of what might be toward, and Madge for many reasons, Mr. Anthony Lane Penrose being not the least of them.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH UNCLE RALPH GREATLY ENJOYS THE SITUATION.

IN the meanwhile Anthony was finding time hang rather heavily on his hands. His inclination lay most decidedly in the direction of Whindles; discretion, on the contrary, bade him remain where he was, and between the two he was, metaphorically speaking, kicking his heels.

He had the run of the inn for the day, with Annie to look after him and with Winnie for company. After he had returned from Whindles on the previous evening he had overheard Mrs. Hodges say that she would like to go with William to the fair, only she did not care to leave Annie alone for a whole day.

"Look here, Mrs. Hodges," he said, "I am not going anywhere to-morrow. Let me take care of 'The Traveller's Joy' while you go to the fair. Find me a big apron, and I will tuck up my shirt-sleeves and be the man behind the bar,"

Mrs. Hodges laughed; clearly she did not take him seriously.

"Oh, I mean it," Anthony went on.

Mrs. Hodges demurred, but finally William was consulted, and Anthony had his way.

He enjoyed himself immensely, and helped Annie to serve their few customers with quite a professional air.

But now, after dinner, the novelty had begun to wear off, and there seemed to be less excitement in inn-keeping than he had imagined. He looked at the clock; it said a quarter past two. Then he wondered if Uncle Ralph had arrived at Whindles yet.

Winnie came dancing into the bar. As a matter of fact, she had spent nearly the whole of the morning in there with Anthony.

"Uncle Tony," she said, pulling at his hand, "let's go into the fields."

"What for, little one?" he queried, not without signs of yielding in his voice.

"Come along!" she said, tugging his arm. Then she shook her head backwards and forwards, and the sunny curls brushed his hand. "Come along!" she reiterated.

"Very well. Give me a kiss, and we will go and tell Annie."

They raced each other across the road, and Anthony tossed her over the gate, which pleased Winnie so mightily that the performance had to be repeated, and her laughter rang again. They had half an hour's tumble in the grass, and Anthony gave her a pick-a-back all round the field, and found spiders for her, and a daddy-long-legs, and he found the time drag less, though he felt very lazy out there in the sunshine.

"Must we go back now?" asked Winnie presently, pausing in the midst of her endeavours to poke a long grass into Anthony's ear. "See you make a funny face," she told him with delightful frankness.

Anthony looked at his watch.

"Yes, dear, we will go back now," and shoulder-high he carried her into the inn.

He found a parson in possession of the kitchen, the same one he had so opportunely disturbed when he had met Madge in Wainford.

The parson looked Anthony up and down.

"Hodges has gone to Lychcombe, I hear."

"Yes," replied Anthony. "Did you want him?"

"No; I am only making one of my periodical calls." The tone was supercilious.

"Perhaps you could call again," suggested Anthony suavely.

They eyed each other with mutual disapproval. The parson wondered where he had seen this fellow before.

"May I ask who *you* are?" he said.

"My name? Lane," returned the other shortly.

"Uncle Tony, may I sit on your knee?" chimed in Winnie, who came in at that moment.

The parson was enlightened.

"Oh, I see," he said blandly. "You are Mrs. Hodges' brother."

Anthony made no attempt to correct him; he was wondering how to get rid of him.

"Perhaps you will call again," he suggested for the second time.

"H'm, yes! Will you bring me a glass of the best cider?" replied the parson.

Anthony fetched it for him.

"Threepence, please!" he said, in his most business-like manner.

"Oh, but I don't pay! Hodges always provides me with some little refreshment after my long walk."

"Mr. Hodges is not here to-day; I am afraid you must pay," returned Anthony.

"But, my good fellow, I never do pay."

"Then you won't drink!" said Anthony, with unmistakable emphasis.

The parson was speechless. He gathered up his hat and stick, and with a look which should have withered Anthony made for the door.

"Good afternoon," said Anthony sweetly.

A ringing laugh which followed him into the road did not help to improve the parson's temper. He had not gone far when he chanced to meet Madge and Amy with Uncle Ralph.

"I am so glad to see you back again, Mr. Harford," he said. "I hope you are well; and you, Miss Weston, and you," and he bowed to Amy. "Are you going for a walk?"

"We are going to 'The Traveller's Joy,'" replied Uncle Ralph.

"You will not find Hodges at home."

"Oh!"

"No; he and his wife have gone to Lychcombe Fair, and have left some ill-bred fellow at the inn to look after the place."

"Who is he?" asked Uncle Ralph, and even Madge seemed to be interested.

"A brother of Mrs. Hodges', I fancy. The child called him 'Uncle Tony.' A more insolent fellow I never met; I believe he would have turned me out had I stayed any longer."

Madge thought it very probable.

Uncle Ralph laughed.

"Well, I shall be prepared," he said, as they passed on.

Nor did the Rev. Mr. Stall think he had made much headway with that portion of his flock.

"A more insolent fellow I never met," recited Madge, with her head in the air, imitating with refreshing accuracy the parson's indignant cadence. "I should have liked to have seen that young man turning him out," she added vivaciously.

"I think I will go on alone and interview this worthy person," said Uncle Ralph, who had his own idea who the worthy person was. "I can arrange for tea—unless he turns me out," he added laughing.

Anthony, in a very placid frame of mind, was standing at the door of the inn looking out upon the fields, when an elderly gentleman came up to him. He was a very pleasant-looking old gentleman,

so Anthony thought, with a ruddy face and white whiskers.

"Can I see Mr. Hodges?" he asked.

The voice was hearty, but not that of a countryman. Anthony noticed that his eyes were decidedly humorous.

"I am sorry Mr. Hodges is away to-day," was Anthony's reply. "Come in, sir. Can I do anything for you?"

His tone was almost professional.

"Yes, I daresay you can. I want tea at five o'clock for two ladies and myself."

"Certainly, sir."

Anthony wondered who the old gentleman was.

"We had it in the garden when we came before," continued the other; "perhaps we could do the same again?"

"Yes, sir; I will see to it myself," replied Anthony, thinking how well he was progressing.

"Thank you, young man. At five o'clock then."

"What a jolly old boy!" Anthony said to himself as he watched him depart.

Had he heard the same jolly old boy's chuckle of satisfaction when he had turned the corner, Anthony might have thought him a still jollier old boy. Uncle

Ralph had satisfied himself as to the identity of both Mrs. Hodges' brother and Mr. Lane, but he omitted to acquaint Madge of the fact.

Anthony called Annie.

"An old gentleman wants tea for himself and two ladies, in the garden, at five o'clock," he explained.

"Do you know who he is, sir?" asked Annie.

"No, that I don't, but he has evidently been here before."

"What did he order for tea?"

"Order! Why, nothing." Anthony seemed surprised. "I did not think to ask him what he wanted," he added.

Annie laughed, respectfully enough, but as though she would say, "There's a fine innkeeper for you!"

Just as Anthony was amusing himself by serving a customer with some ale in the bar the old gentleman returned, and with him Amy and Madge.

A flash of recognition from Madge, who was suddenly very rosy, a look of intense amusement from Amy, and a cheerful nod from the "old gentleman," and they all three passed into the garden.

Anthony was bewildered, amazed. So that "jolly old boy" was Uncle Ralph. Oh, if only he had known!

Here was a dilemma. How could he claim acquaintance with Madge after they had caught him serving ale in the bar? What would Uncle Ralph think? Again, had Madge yet told Uncle Ralph anything concerning him? If so—Anthony grew hot at the thought—she would introduce him to Uncle Ralph as Mr. Lane. He imagined her: "Uncle, this is Mr. Lane, of whom I told you; he was at college with Dick," and so on. And all the time he was not really Mr. Lane, and there would be no end to the explanation he would have to give. Nor was that the worst, for even Madge did not know his identity—so he thought.

Clearly there was nothing for it but to wait some sign from Madge; for unless she had told Uncle Ralph about him, the old gentleman would merely think him some friend of William's, who was looking after the inn during the latter's absence.

"A pretty mess you have got into, Master Tony," he soliloquised.

In great trepidation, though with a bold front, Anthony approached the little party in the garden. Would Madge give him any sign, he wondered. But, no! there was no sign other than in her eyes, and they asked him many questions. Child Winnie,

who had lost no time in making herself one of the party, was dancing round Madge.

"Come along, Uncle Tony," she called when he appeared. She thought her circle of friends complete now.

"So *you* are Mrs. Hodges' brother!" said Uncle Ralph, with kindly deliberation.

Anthony gasped; this was worse than he had expected. Surely Mr. Lane was enough!

"You are not unlike your sister," Uncle Ralph went on, gently exercising his imagination. "Don't you think so?" This to Madge, who did not, however, see a very striking likeness. The old gentleman turned to Anthony again. "How do you like this part of the country?" he asked.

"Very much," replied Anthony, relieved at being able to speak the truth.

Clearly Uncle Ralph knew nothing of his doings. He resolved to act up to his part as well as possible, and to get a word alone with Madge if he could manage it.

"Have you been here long?" pursued Uncle Ralph.

"About a fortnight, sir."

"You have not come for good, I suppose. How long do you think of staying?"

Taking a covert glance at Madge, Anthony thought that he had decidedly come for *good.*

"I am going to stay as long as I can, sir," he said. "It is such a lovely country about here."

"Good! You like the country, then?"

"Yes, sir, and it does not matter which way one goes here, it is all beautiful."

Anthony thought he was getting on swimmingly.

"Have you been on the downs yet?" was the next question.

Both Madge and Anthony received something of a shock, and Madge wondered for a moment if Uncle Ralph knew more than he appeared to know.

"Yes," replied Anthony. "And I thought it the finest scenery of all, until——" He paused, feeling that he was getting a little out of his depth.

"Until what?" queried Uncle Ralph encouragingly.

"Until I went up the river," finished Anthony, making a dash for it.

"Oh, you have been up the river! It is very quiet and pretty, though rather small. My house is close by it at Wainford."

"Oh, is it, sir?"

Anthony's tone was one oi mild interest. He dare not glance at Madge lest he might forget who he was altogether. What with Mr. Lane, and Mrs. Hodges' brother, and with Mr. Penrose to follow, he was rather hard put to it.

"The next time William comes to see me you must come with him. I will show you my roses," said Uncle Ralph. "I have known William for a long time, you know," he added.

"Thank you, I shall be pleased to come," was the reply. "I fancy I shall go to see his roses quite on my own account," thought Anthony. "Shall I bring the tea now?" he queried, anxious for a few minutes' reprieve.

"Thank you, yes!"

"A very nice, intelligent young fellow," Uncle Ralph went on, addressing himself to Madge, when Anthony had gone.

"Yes! No wonder he nearly turned the reverend gentleman out," she replied, resolved to play her part and to let things drift as they were for the present.

She felt that any explanation to Uncle Ralph was out of the question until Anthony had made good his arrears of explanation to her. Things were in as pretty a tangle as possible. No sooner had she

discovered that her Mr. Lane was not Mr. Lane at all, but Mr. Penrose, than she found him masquerading as Mrs. Hodges' brother, and without a word to explain that. "What will Uncle Ralph think of it all?" she asked herself, not knowing how the old gentleman was enjoying himself. She looked at Amy; but that young lady, who only smiled in a most unsympathetic manner, appeared to find the situation rather amusing; certainly it was unmistakably refreshing.

"Fancy Mrs. Hodges having such a distinguished-looking brother!" Amy said.

"He looks rather like an artist, or a diplomat, or even an author," quoth Uncle Ralph.

And Madge remembered the portrait in the book he had brought her, and wondered again.

"He seemed quite pleased when you asked him to come to Whindles with William," went on Amy.

"Yes; I do not doubt we shall see him there before long," returned Uncle Ralph.

"Here he comes with the tea," exclaimed Madge, who had kept one eye at least on the door.

Anthony bore a tray. Besides the usual accessories of the tea-table, there was a jug of cream and a dish of strawberries.

"They are the first from the garden, sir," he explained. "It is rather early for them yet."

Madge had taken off her hat, and as she sat there the sunbeams glinted in her hair, as the leaves above her danced in the breeze. When she looked at Anthony there was just the daintiest morning of a smile hovering about her mouth, and her eyes laughed between the questions they asked. Beautiful and very winsome she looked, her chin tilted so that the soft curve of her throat showed above the lace she wore at her neck.

"And what a rose of a mouth!" thought Anthony for the hundredth time; and when he returned with the tray again he added a bowl of sweet peas, which he set in the middle of the table, so that it made a splash of gorgeous colour and sweetness, for which Madge thanked him with her eyes.

Leaving them to their repast, he made his way to a corner of the garden, where he stayed awhile, to all appearance in deep meditation. It was really a point of vantage from whence he could see Madge without being seen himself. Her face was towards him, and he could feast his eyes on her; while of Uncle Ralph he could see only the back, which was as much as he cared about just then.

"How beautiful she is!" Anthony commented. "How glad! how radiant! how adorable! Look at her!" he urged himself, though he had not taken his eyes off her yet. "She is a Peri of the fields. See how her face glows, as though the very sun were glad to shine upon it! See how brown and wholesome and sunny she is altogether!"

Madge raised her arm, so that the loose lace sleeve of her dress fell back above her elbow, showing a splendid curve. Anthony caught his breath. Something Winnie said at the table made them laugh, but *her* laughter rang out the merriest of all, light as a little roulade of summer and green leaves, and Anthony laughed too, softly to himself, for very joy of it.

After a while he went into the inn and stood at the front doorway and watched the swallows again. Skimming and twittering, they went up and down the road and over the meadow, and when they darted past him their wings in the sunlight were living flashes of dull gold.

"There is none like her," he insisted, for his thoughts were only partly with the swallows, and that only for the gladness of their coming and of their going.

Presently a light footstep broke into his reverie, and, turning, he met Madge.

She gave him her hand, shyly, yet laughing the while.

"What do you mean by it?" she asked him.

"I hardly know myself," admitted Anthony. "You must please forgive me, I am profoundly penitent. I could hardly claim friendship under the peculiar conditions of our meeting to-day, could I?" he went on.

"I don't think I would have minded," said Madge, her eyes on the ground for a moment.

Anthony gave her a swift look.

"Besides," he continued, "I did not know if you had mentioned me to Uncle Ralph."

"As a matter of fact I have not—*Mr. Penrose.*"

Anthony gasped with astonishment. The unfamiliar sound of his own name startled him considerably.

"Mr. Penrose!" he exclaimed. "How did you know?"

Madge laughed low.

"Ha! Uncle Ralph brought——"

"Can you oblige me with some notepaper and envelopes, young man?" a genial voice broke in.

It was Uncle Ralph himself who came so inopportunely.

"Certainly, sir," replied Anthony, all attention. Madge had fled.

"I wish to write a short note to William, if you will kindly give it to him when he returns," the old gentleman explained.

The paper was produced—some of Anthony's own, as it happened—and Uncle Ralph wrote his letter. But though he tried to put himself in the way of Madge, Anthony had no further opportunity of learning how she had discovered Mr. Penrose, or what share Uncle Ralph had in the matter.

"Be sure you give the note to William as soon as he comes back, please; and do not forget to come to see me," was Uncle Ralph's parting injunction to Anthony, "that is, if you are interested in roses," he added with a quiet chuckle. He held out his hand. "Good evening to you."

"Good evening," replied Anthony to all three in turn—and they were gone; but not before he had observed with a thrill of delight that Madge was wearing some of his sweet peas at her waist.

An impulse sent him hastening to the table in the garden where she had sat, and there, half hidden

among the other peas, was the rose she had worn at her breast.

He put it to his lips, and its fragrance set his blood lilting through his veins; it seemed to bear the very sweetness of her presence.

Not long afterwards William and his wife returned.

"Well, sir, how have you been getting on?" asked William.

Anthony related the various incidents of the day, dwelling with peculiar gusto upon the discomfiture of the Rev. Mr. Stall, then he gave William the note which Uncle Ralph had left.

William read it, laughed when he was half-way through, then rubbed his head in a puzzled manner, and began to read the letter again, aloud this time:—

"'DEAR MR. HODGES,—I am sorry not to find you at home to-day. 'The Traveller's Joy' is not quite the same without you, though your brother-in-law has proved himself a valuable assistant by the way he has looked after us.

"'Will it be troubling you to give the enclosed note to Mr. Penrose' [here Anthony felt his heart jump] who, I believe, is staying with you?

"'Yours sincerely,

"'RALPH HARFORD.'"

William looked blankly from one to the other.

"Mr. Penrose!" said Mrs. Hodges. "Who's Mr. Penrose?"

"Mr. Harford! Who is Mr. Harford?" said Anthony at the same time.

"Mr. Harford is Miss Weston's uncle. Didn't you know, sir?" said Mrs. Hodges, genuinely surprised.

"No! I thought his name was Weston too."

"But who's Mr. Penrose?" asked William, turning the note over and over, as though the clue was eluding him round and round the envelope. "There's nobody but you staying here, Mr. Lane," he added, "and you ain't Mr. Penrose."

"I *am* Mr. Penrose," said Anthony, as though a change of name was a very ordinary occurrence.

"You're Mr. Penrose! Then who the devil is my brother-in-law?" said the astonished William, completely startled out of his wonted stolidity.

"I am afraid I am your brother-in-law too,' said Anthony, laughing; and he gradually unfolded the mystery.

William laughed, immoderately for him.

"Well, sir, if that don't beat everything," he said

"You have been and mixed things up nicely," Mrs. Hodges added.

"But how did Mr. Harford find out who you are?"

"I do not know." Anthony paused. "Let me read my note."

It was couched in rather more formal terms than the other, and ran as follows:—

"'Mr. Ralph Harford would be pleased if Mr. Anthony Lane Penrose would take luncheon with him and Miss Weston at Whindles to-morrow.'"

"There's not much explanation there," remarked Mrs. Hodges.

But it had already dawned upon Anthony; and as he looked back over the happenings of the past fortnight their perspective altered; his efforts to keep the conversation from turning upon Uncle Ralph, commendable enough at the time, now appeared very funny indeed.

"I think I know now," he said ruefully, inwardly calling himself many uncomplimentary things for not having known before.

"Mr. Harford is my publisher, and he must have recognised me from my photo. I will go and fetch one of my books."

He went upstairs, and came back with one of the

volumes intended for Madge. Oddly enough, they had come that very morning.

"There!" he said, opening it at his portrait.

"That be you, right enough," said William critically, glancing from the portrait to Anthony and back again.

"And did you really write this book, sir?" asked Mrs. Hodges with admiration.

"Yes," affirmed Anthony. "There's Mr. Harford's name, you see," he added, pointing out the publisher's imprint at the bottom of the title-page.

"Well I never!" said William. "And didn't you know that"—with an inclination of his head over his shoulder—"was him?"

"No. I remember you once mentioned Mr. Harford's name, but I did not connect it with Miss Weston's uncle. He has always been Uncle Ralph as far as I am concerned."

"I don't seem quite clear, somehow," said William. "It seems as though you must be Mr. Lane, though you've got called Mr. Penrose. We've got to get used to *him*, I reckon."

Anthony laughed.

"Well, I am Mr. Lane, but my name isn't; that is the puzzle, eh?"

"That's it, sir, and I can't make out which is right."

Anthony took his book upstairs again.

William looked at his wife, and laughed again.

"Isn't he a rum 'un?" was his comment, and Mrs. Hodges assented. "Fancy writing a book, and then trying to make out as if you hadn't!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEREIN CERTAIN MATTERS ARE READJUSTED.

"I LEFT a note asking Mr. Penrose to lunch to-day," Uncle Ralph informed Madge at breakfast the next morning.

Madge looked so thoroughly astonished that Amy laughed outright.

"Did you know who he was all the time?"

"Yes, I did."

Uncle Ralph's chuckle was reminiscent of a pleasant tea at the inn.

"And you asked him all those questions?" Madge went on.

"Yes."

Uncle Ralph was very cheerful over it.

"And you made believe he was Mrs. Hodges' brother, though you knew he wasn't anything of the kind?"

"Yes. Didn't that child Winnie call him Uncle Tony?" Uncle Ralph's chuckle grew into a laugh. "And didn't I ask you if you saw any likeness?"

"Uncle, you are a reprehensible old person," said Madge solemnly.

"I might say that you are a reprehensible young one," returned he.

"It is really too bad," began Madge, then she also had to laugh. "How you must have enjoyed yourself!" she continued.

"We did," replied Amy.

"You too! Did you know all about it?" Amy nodded over her handkerchief. "And I have been puzzling my head as to how I could put things straight!" exclaimed Madge. "He is coming to see you to-day, uncle—this morning, I think."

"Yes, I know he is; I asked him."

"He was coming without that," she said.

"He seems to have been a good many times without that," returned Uncle Ralph drily; "he is very welcome all the same."

"Is he?" asked Madge, as though it were not the one fact she had insisted upon during the last week.

"Yes; the man who can make us laugh well must be counted among our friends."

"Uncle, you are dreadful! What time did you ask Mr. Penrose to come?"

"I did not mention any particular time."

"But he won't know what time to come."

"Oh, he will take care not to be late," Uncle Ralph said confidently. "You see, if I had said one o'clock he would not have known what to do with himself all the morning; but as I did not mention the hour, he can be here by half-past ten so as to be in time."

Apparently Madge was of the same opinion, for soon after ten o'clock she went out, and across the fields, without explaining what her errand might be. But walking in a leisurely manner, she met Anthony about half-way from "The Traveller's Joy."

"Well, who am I to be to-day?" he asked, laughing into her eyes, as they shook hands.

"Yourself, please!" she said.

"That will seem strange," he answered, "and to be oneself is not always easy."

"No, I suppose not."

"Though I should hardly think it would be difficult for you," he added.

"Don't you think you owe me an explanation?" Madge queried.

"I do," Anthony rejoined fervently, "but I do not know where to begin. Everything is in such a tangle."

"I am sure it will be a long story. Suppose we sit under that oak tree," said Madge, indicating a green retreat by the hedgerow, where a great oak made a cool shade: a white tide of moon-daisies had crept only to the edge of it, and the grass was deep and pleasant to smell.

"Now I will make a full confession," said Anthony when they were seated there; and forthwith he unfolded the mystery of Mr. Lane.

"What a modest person you are!" Madge commented. "I thought that most literary people were never tired of hearing other folks blow their trumpets for them. Uncle Ralph tells some dreadful stories of their doings. But you have entirely upset my idea of them."

Anthony laughed.

"I am glad of that; but it is no virtue to please oneself."

"I am not so sure." Madge shook her head wisely. "It is often more difficult to please oneself than to act according to the standards of other people. But why didn't you explain who you were, afterwards when we had become such good friends?"

"I meant to, in my own way. Perhaps I am not quite so modest as you seem to think," Anthony

deprecated. Then he went on to explain his plan for making himself known to her, and the subsequent delay of his books. "The books only came yesterday. I have them with me now. But I am afraid Uncle Ralph has upset my little scheme." He gave the books into her hands.

Almost reverently she took them, as though she touched some potent talisman, wishing for the moment that Uncle Ralph had not forestalled Anthony.

"I have been reading this one," she said, turning the pages of the smaller volume.

Anthony questioned her, open-eyed.

"Yes, Uncle Ralph brought it for me, that was how I found you out. Your book did it, after all."

"Then you do not want this other copy?" said Anthony ruefully.

"Oh, yes, I do, please! Besides," she said with a smile, "I see you have put my name in it, so I must have it now. But you have not put 'with the author's compliments,'" she added, laughing. "I thought authors always did that."

"There can be no compliments between you and me," Anthony said, not without a moment's fear for his boldness.

"I am so glad," returned Madge simply, "I hate compliments." She looked at the books again. "It is very good of you to give me these," she said.

"Then you forgive me for having deceived you?" he asked eagerly.

"Why, yes. It wasn't altogether your fault, was it? And you did not know at first that we should come to know each other so well."

"No," agreed Anthony, "and it was so delightful to be Mr. Lane that I was quite content to let things go as they pleased, although it sometimes seemed too much of a game of make-believe for my liking."

"How was it you did not guess who Uncle Ralph was?"

"I only heard you mention his Christian name, and took it for granted that he was a Weston. When you said that he was a publisher, I connected him with a firm of that name who publish anything but high-class matter."

"Oh, how could you?" Madge exclaimed.

"I cannot imagine now. After I had read his note last evening, and learned his name, it dawned upon me that he was my publisher."

"He is my mother's brother," explained Madge. "I am afraid he enjoyed himself at our expense.

You see, he *knew* all about you, while I only guessed; and Amy had told him of your coming to Whindles, so he had the clue to the whole situation."

"Didn't you know that he knew?"

"No, that was just the point. If I had it wouldn't have mattered."

Anthony whistled.

"No wonder he was so mightily interested in Hodges' brother-in-law!" They laughed together at the remembrance. "When I first saw Uncle Ralph, not knowing who he was, I thought what a jolly old boy he seemed," said Anthony flippantly; "but I did not gauge the possibilities of his jollity."

"Oh, you thought him a 'jolly old boy' did you? Suppose I tell him; he will be amused."

"Please don't," pleaded Anthony, "I require all my courage to face him as it is after yesterday."

"You need not worry," returned Madge, "he is the dearest old uncle in the world."

There was a pause. Anthony lay stretched out on his back looking up at Madge between the long grass. She was turning the pages of his book rather intently.

"Tell me," he said, "do you care for any of those things?"

She looked down at him with a smile for his laziness. He was always goodly to look upon.

"I think some are very beautiful," she said. "How you must love the earth."

"I do, and yet"—he raised himself on his elbow—"I believe that you love it better than I do."

"I?" She was incredulous. "No, you are mistaken. I love it—altogether," she widened her arms as though to embrace the distant woods and the clouds as well, "but I could not write of it as you do."

"You cannot measure the depth of love by the weight of words," he returned. "I have loved Nature less for herself than for her moods—for her silence, her witchery, her splendour. Perhaps I have most admiration for Nature as an artist. What an incomparable artist she is too—what colour! what vast windy lights! what haunting shadows! I begin now to feel that my love has been too much tempered with admiration; but you"—here he paused to gather fervour—"you seem to love every flower and every bird, everything that grows and turns a face sunwards. Your feet go always among things you love, and I have seen you clap your hands because a little white

cloud sailed into the blue from some haven behind the pines, and you laugh always in the sunlight.'

"So do you," interrupted Madge.

"The flowers are your friends," he continued, "you have names for them all, while I scarcely knew one of them until you showed me. You have found the way to Nature's heart because of your love: I have hardly begun to read her face aright."

"No, no!" Madge protested, "that is only your way of putting it. I am not clever as you are, but I have lived nearly all my life in the country, and I have grown to know things because I love them. When you love anyone very much you try to learn all you can about them, don't you?"

Anthony nodded thoughtfully.

"That proves I am a laggard in love as far as Nature is concerned," he replied, "for I am only just beginning to learn."

"I have learned a good deal this morning," returned Madge.

"You have?" He wondered for the moment what she meant.

"Yes, I have been reading your book, and have learned something of your way of loving the earth.

Isn't it very happy for you to be able to put it into words like that?"

"Yes," he said, "it is, but one is seldom satisfied."

"You literary people seem never satisfied," laughed Madge.

Anthony looked at her.

"Sometimes we are," he said quietly.

"I should like to have seen you tackling the parson yesterday," said Madge presently.

Anthony laughed at the recollection.

"If you had been there," he said, "I am afraid I should have displayed more zeal than he deserved. The look he gave me when I told him he must pay for his drink or go thirsty was very comical. He went off in a rare huff."

"I know. We met the church militant in full and indignant retreat when we were on our way to the inn."

"Did you?" Anthony was interested.

"Yes, he told us that some 'insolent fellow' at the inn was eager to turn him out."

"He was right there," said Anthony, laughing grimly.

"It is a pity he is so objectionable. The parson before him was such a fine old gentleman; everybody

in the village loved him. Goodness seemed a habit with him."

They were silent for a while.

"I think we must be going home now," remarked Madge.

"What time does Uncle Ralph expect me," said Anthony.

"Rather early, I think," replied Madge.

And Anthony thought how adorable she looked when she blushed.

Anthony had no desire to alter his opinion that Uncle Ralph was a jolly old boy. Luncheon proved a well-nigh boisterous repast, so heartily did they laugh at the cross-questioning and mutual explanations; for, of course, the whole tangle had to be unravelled, though not without many interruptions.

At last Anthony was fully installed at Whindles under his own lawful patronymic.

Becky conveyed the news to James with an air of great mystery.

"Fancy, now, he isn't Mr. Lane at all."

James was duly impressed.

"What, Mr. Lane ain't Mr. Lane at all?"

"No; he's Mr. Penrose, and the master knows him well."

"It'll be all right for him and Miss Madge then, surelye!"

Certainly Mr. Penrose found more favour in the eyes of that worthy couple than ever Mr. Lane did.

After that day Whindles saw more of Anthony than before, if that were possible. The interest he took in the cultivation of roses was astonishing.

Nominally "The Traveller's Joy" was still his head-quarters, but he was more often to be found otherwhere. Accommodation was offered, and on more than one occasion he spent the night at Whindles. And that meant long radiant summer evenings spent with Madge.

They would stay out together until the dusk deepened into the soft June night, until the bats fluttered out from the shadows over the glimmering spaces of white road, and the *whir* of the night-jar came over the silent trees.

"What *is* that bird?" queried Anthony one night when the strange whirring sound, so wholly pleasing and companionable, swelled out, and was answered over the bracken. "I have heard it nearly every night during this last week."

"That is a churn owl," said Madge; "it has a curious note, hasn't it?"

"Oh, a *note*, is it!" Anthony chuckled. "Then I should call it a song of work, it sounds like it. Just listen! the thing goes on and on with incomparable industry and energy. Does it never stop?"

"In the daytime it does. But if you wake in the middle of the night you will still hear it *whirring*."

"I hope I may sleep the sleep of the just," responded he.

Then Madge explained that really it was not an owl at all, but the less common night-jar.

The mornings, too, were theirs—such splendid summer mornings, steeped in beauty.

The day after his second night at Whindles Anthony heard someone stirring before five o'clock, while he was dressing. Something rattled against his window, and Madge's voice hailed him as he looked out.

"Get up, lazy bones! The sun has been up an hour and more. Come and see how the dew sparkles!"

Then Anthony heard her go singing into the garden.

"Why are you always singing?" he asked, when he joined her afterwards.

"Am I? Because I am always happy and summer is here, I expect."

They walked down the garden, and reached the "water-gate." She turned and faced him as he opened it for her.

"I think I cannot help being happy," she said, "the world is so beautiful. This morning, for example, isn't it good to be alive?"

"It is," he assented, "so good that I feel as though I could sing too."

"Then why don't you try?"

Anthony shook his head.

"No, I will whistle and throw a stone into the river."

"That's just like a man."

"Or a boy," he suggested.

They walked on by the river. The fields on their left were of gossamer, silver-wet with dew, flushed rosy with the first fine ardour of the day. Morning was a priceless gift; there was the blackcap in the orchard, and the lark upwards, out of sight, in the blue; the sky was like a pearl; there was unspeakable light, and everywhere colour—red roofs, which the sun had not yet dried, green trees, and blossom, and the long, cool shadows; and there was the scent of the lime trees and the grass, the clean, sweet smell of the early world.

"Every morning the world wakes young again," said Anthony.

"And a morning such as this makes one feel sparkling," added Madge.

"If it wasn't so full of wonder and beauty I should want to do something boisterous; I feel equal to any caper."

"Is the morning such a sober thing, then?" she asked.

"Not exactly sober, but so beautiful that to do any boisterous thing would spoil it. It makes one feel physically religious," returned Anthony.

"I understand. Let us do something beautiful, then," said Madge, and stooping, she began to unfasten her shoes, Anthony observing for the first time that she wore no stockings.

"I am going to walk barefooted in the dew," she explained. She soon had off her shoes, and Anthony was not long behind her. All round the meadow they went, she in front stepping out daintily, her white feet bathed in dew and covered with the golden pollen of buttercups; he plodding after her and feeling strangely elated.

Presently Madge stopped and buried her face in a patch of dewy clover; she looked up with

the dewdrops sparkling on her cheeks and on her hair.

"There," she said, "that would wash every bit of the 'town' away, if there were any to wash. Isn't the grass cool and soft?"

"This is a new sensation for me," said Anthony, walking round in a little circle as though to make sure what it did feel like.

"What! Haven't you paddled in the dew before?"

He acknowledged that he had not.

"Why if I had slept out for one night, the first thing I should think of in the morning would be a dew-bath," said Madge. "Come along, let us go round the field again."

To set their feet in the dew was like an act of worship. To Anthony it seemed that his feet were consecrated to tread the way of beauty for the rest of the day; he felt clean throughout.

And so the reality of their companionship brought to them a growing familiarity, very beautiful, and good for both of them. It seemed to be taken for granted that they twain should be together. But when Madge's duties kept her in the kitchen Anthony took the opportunity to cultivate the

society of Uncle Ralph assiduously, much to the old gentleman's pleasure.

Coatless, they pursued the intricacies of garden craft together. And not the least delight was when Madge came to look on, teasing Anthony the while. Merry times they were, but I fancy more work was accomplished when Madge was in the kitchen; at least, so James said, and he ought to know.

There came a day of rain. Swift storms swept up from beyond the hills, with moments of torn sky—little patches of blue caught in a tangle of white clouds—between them.

In the afternoon Madge and Anthony were sitting on the window-seat; he had been reading, but now they were talking to Uncle Ralph. Outside the rain pattered on the leaves, singing with rhythmic persistence its song of the earth's greenness; and through the open lattice crept the wet sweetness of the garden.

A brightness, hardly perceptible at first, seemed to grow into the room, and Madge glanced up over her shoulder. Then she rose and looked out.

"The rain has stopped again," she said to Anthony. "Let us go and see."

They went out together into the garden, between the dripping roses, to the lawn.

"Look!" said Madge.

Beyond the poplars a great space of palest gold was coming towards them, gathering splendour from the wet, shining fields as it came. Far over, a Lombardy poplar suddenly became a spire of shimmering bronze, and a red roof shone out with a little burnish of gold on its wet tiles, and a vein of blue vapour hung over the farthest fields.

Nearer and nearer moved that widening space of gold, and suddenly it was all about them, like the first wave of a glad and wonderful sea; and the garden sparkled with jewels. The roses held gems more brilliant than the dew; among the leaves there shone pearl and amethyst, ruby and emerald, set in silver and pale gold. With every rustle of the wind the trees scattered a lavish treasure; the garden glistened with the magic of the rain.

"Look!" said Madge again.

She had turned with her face towards the river and the sky. Anthony saw a great pile of dark clouds wreathed with ruddy gold. The rain was passing up the valley in royal splendour—the great army of the Rain-King, in seeming anger, with

flashing spears and lances tipped with light, conquering whole kingdoms of the air. Higher, the clouds lifted their summits like vast sun-washed mountains that filled the sky with light.

Anthony watched, saying never a word. He was standing beside Madge; then somehow it happened that their hands touched and his fingers closed over hers, while their faces sought the sky together.

The words he might have said then were left unspoken, for he heard Amy coming towards them. But for a moment Madge left her hand in his; then she turned her face to him—like a sweet, glad rose, it was for joy—and gave him a swift, unwavering look. And her eyes seemed to have caught something of the wonder of the sky, and of the great white clouds, and of the sunlit rain. In them was the sunlight itself and a tenderness beyond all symbol; the which if a man sees in a woman's eyes, for himself, let him be assured that he has solved the riddle of the joy of life, for it is the promise of the fulfilment of the heart's desire.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH OUR TRAVELLER FINDS HIS JOY.

MADGE stood at the open window, looking out into the garden, her hands toying with a rose that hung almost into the room.

Anthony entered, and, seeing her alone, paused with his hand upon the door. Then he came over to her, she not turning her head; but about her mouth there was a smile that made her lips tremble, and a little pulse throbbed in her throat, for the wonder of that unforgettable moment of yesterday was upon her.

"I am going away on Friday," said Anthony, breaking the silence.

Madge turned towards him then.

"You going away!" she echoed.

Anthony nodded.

"Yes, I had a letter this morning; I must go on Friday." The day was Monday. "Are you sorry?" he asked.

Her eyes fell before his gaze, and sought the garden

again. She nodded. Somehow the words would not come just then.

Anthony took the hand that hung by her side.

"Madge," he whispered, calling her by her name for the first time, "Madge, I love you. I love you," he repeated. "And *you?*"

She turned, with the light of a great joy in her eyes, and for answer kissed him on the lips.

"I?" she said, with wonder in her voice. "Why, don't you know? I love you—ah! I love you!"

Then he took her face in his two hands, and kissed her—on the lips, for the very passion of love; and on the cheeks, for the joy he had of her; and on the brow, for the reverence that he bore her: and this he did many times.

They stood for awhile, each held fast to the other, and saying but little, for they had entered that garden of delight wherein silence is accounted of greater worth than speech, and sweeter than any music.

"You love me, so?" he asked presently.

"And more than I can tell you," she replied. "Did you never guess?"

"I hoped and was glad, yet I hardly dared to hope too much. It seemed enough that I should be with you. When I left you after that day on Marple

Down I knew that nothing would be of any worth without you. I think I loved you from the first. God make me worthy of you, my beloved," he said solemnly, as one who would bare his head and look upwards.

"Love me and make *me* worthy of you," she said, drawing his head down to kiss his brow with an infinite tenderness.

"Love me and be made all of worth," she might have said.

They wanted to be alone with their joy.

"Come, let us go out," said Anthony; "the sun is shining."

"It will always be sunshine now," returned Madge.

How wonderful the world had grown! It had always been good to live, but now life had become the perfect gift of the gods. Love and Joy and Hope—these were the three Fates, and of their spinning was the golden thread of life.

They went out together, and Madge bade Anthony stay while she gathered for him a rose of deepest crimson. She fastened it in his coat with hands that trembled and were eager. For her Anthony chose one that was nearly full blown, showing its golden centre.

"It has a heart of gold," said Madge, and she touched it lightly with her lips.

"And you are my *Rosa amorosa,* my Rose of Love," returned Anthony.

They went along by the river, passing under the grey old bridge; and on, with the water-meadows beside them, where the yellow iris grew on the banks and the flowering rush. Presently they rested in a corner of a hayfield, beside a little brook that went trickling down to the river by the meadow-sweet and purple mint.

They sat until the sun, dropping down a flushed sky, filled the meadows with a golden glow; and something of the calm of the evening grew into their passion, and in the uplifting of their hearts they were filled with a measureless content.

In the first exaltation of their knowledge the earth had called to them, and love led their feet to her by way of the fields and the shining river, amid the blown scent of the flowers and the rustle of waving grasses, under a sky that seemed wholly made for joy and for deep, sweet thoughts. The sunlight called them, and they went out into it; it filled their eyes, and when they looked each upon the other they were satisfied—for love is fulfilment.

"O Joy, to love is to be all of longing, and of wonder, and of delight," said Anthony.

"To love is to lose all oneself in another,' responded Madge.

"Nay, to love is to gain all!

"To be loved is to have the sunlight in one's heart," said she.

"And in one's face," thought Anthony, as he watched her.

"To be loved by you is the sum of all good, it is heart's content," he replied, touching her lips with his own. "To love is to be all made of faith and service," he continued, in the words of another. "I love you."

She hugged the words as it were in her breast, and repeated them under her breath.

"It is wonderful!" she exclaimed.

"What is wonderful?" he asked her, though he knew full well.

"Everything—that you should love me."

She was shy again.

"No, no! that is not wonderful at all," he said. She was kneeling on the grass very close to him. "Do you know how beautiful you are?" he continued, bending towards her. "You are joy made manifest."

For answer she stayed his mouth with her lips, flushing with pleasure at his words, and her eyes were shining like stars.

She drew back and opened her arms to the fields sunwards.

"O world, world," she said, "I love you!"

"*Rosa mundi,* Rose of Love—the great glad world and the golden heart of the rose—their secret is the same, and we have found it in the heart of the rose," said Anthony.

"We will find it in the glad world—together," she added, putting her hand in his.

They rose and walked on until the sun dipped into a maze of little clouds like flower petals blown down the sky; and coming to a copse where the honeysuckle grew, Anthony must needs gather for her a great sweet bunch of it. Then they turned homewards, and the twilight fell over the fields, rosy at first, then softer and deeper, with shadows of bosky green. And by and by amid the shadows there came a silver radiance, stealthy as the dawn, until the whole night was given up to the moon.

"Let us not go in yet," pleaded Anthony. "Look at the moon! There never was such a night as this!"

Madge smiled at his eagerness and assented.

They passed the garden and wandered across the meadows, and so into a coppice, by winding grassy ways, where thrushes feed at sunrise. They lingered in the haunts of the fern, where the scent of bruised fronds hung in the air; they went softly across open glades flooded with moonlight—spaces of silver silence, set in the shiver and rustle of innumerable leaves—and the night became to them a thing of wonder no less than the day. The woods were the temple of their love, and all things sweet and wholesome and joyous in the life of the world ministered unto their hearts.

They no longer went hand in hand, but with arms folded about each other they wandered until it seemed as though they had entered the haunts of gnomes and dryads, for out of the shadows and out of the moonlit places there came naught but beautiful thoughts and winged fancies.

O mystery of moonlight falling athwart dim spaces of the trees! O magic of the earth—the pungent, summer-haunted earth! O magic of love, whose way they must all tread who would know the things that lie beyond, warm about the glad heart of the world! O mystery of Life, that,

strange and sweet, wakens only in the keeping of another!

"We must go in now," said Madge, as they recrossed the field in the clear moonlight.

"Yes, we must; but—listen, dearest."

"I hear the wind in the rushes and a bird calling over the fields."

"He calls to his mate; I have called to you," he said.

"And have I not answered, my lover?"

They entered the garden, reluctant to the last to leave the meadows.

"What will Uncle Ralph say?" said Madge.

"Ah, we must tell him!"

"Yes, but not to-night."

"No, not to-night; the roses shall keep our secret for to-night. Kiss me, Madge. Ah, Joy! I love you!"

"Good-night, Tony!" She lingered over his name.

"Good night, sweetheart—and good morrow too."

The garden—shadowy, moonlit, redolent of summer—lay sweet about them as they clung in one long embrace. Then they went indoors together.

Uncle Ralph looked up as they entered the room.

It was strange how Anthony had so quickly become one of them.

"Well, where have you been wandering to?" he asked.

"We have been up by the river," replied Madge; "almost to Drover's Ferry—haven't we Tony?"

"Tony, eh!" thought Uncle Ralph, noting the suspicious brightness of her face.

"What did you do for tea?" asked Amy.

"Went without, I will warrant," laughed Uncle Ralph. "Didn't you, now?"

"I believe we did," returned Anthony. He did not seem very sure about it.

"Ah, my boy," Uncle Ralph continued, "don't you let that young lady have her own way too much; she would be dragging us all out into the fields if she could, whether we wanted a meal or no."

"Like you potter about the garden, and forget all about dinner-time, until I have to go and fetch you in. Then you say, 'Why, what's the time, then? Dear me, I did not know it was so late!'"

They all laughed at this sally; but Madge and Anthony kept their secret.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH UNCLE RALPH HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

EARLY the next morning Anthony found Uncle Ralph busy in the garden.

"Now's the time to tackle him," he thought, not without some misgiving. "I have something to tell you," he began.

Uncle Ralph straightened his back.

"Oh! no bad news, I hope?" he said kindly.

"Very bad news, *I* think," returned Anthony. "I have to go away on Friday."

"I am sorry for that, my boy; we are just getting used to you."

"Thank you; I am sorry to go, for you have made me very welcome."

"I think we rather upset the theory that authors and publishers are always at loggerheads, eh?"

Anthony laughed.

"I think we do."

"Have you told Madge?" asked Uncle Ralph. "She will be sorry enough, for you have been rare

chums. Like most young folk, she welcomes a fresh face occasionally."

"Yes, she knows I am going. And I have something else to tell you, Mr. Harford"—Anthony took a prodigious breath—"I love Madge, and she—she loves me too."

Uncle Ralph did not evince the surprise which Anthony expected.

"When did you discover that?" he asked.

"Yesterday afternoon," said Anthony.

"Not till then? Humph! You were a pretty long time about it. I discovered it a week ago."

Anthony was rather taken aback.

"We want your consent," he said lamely.

"My consent, indeed," put in Uncle Ralph, with a fine show of fury. "I think you have done well enough without that. Young people don't generally want the old folk's consent before they fall in love."

Anthony was obliged to laugh.

"To our betrothal, I mean," he said.

"Ah! that is another matter. Madge is over young for that, not twenty-one yet. 'Pon my word!" he ejaculated, "she seems just the bright little thing she ever was. Besides, what do you

know of each other? A month ago you had not seen her."

"I know enough of her to love her," returned the other. "How can I help loving her?"

Uncle Ralph ignored the shrewdness of this appeal, but his eyes twinkled.

"You love her, that is natural enough; but how am I to know that this is not a passing fancy, a holiday attachment that will go with the summer? You have an easy way with you, too, and Madge seems but a girl, she has had but little to do with the world yet."

"Thank Heaven for that!" breathed Anthony fervently. "I love her," he said aloud, emphatically. "I will prove how well I love her."

"I know—" Uncle Ralph wagged his head. "You love as a young man never loved before; there never was love like yours. Ah, my boy, I was young once!"

"Time will prove how well I love her," responded Anthony. "Time, the foe of the unfaithful, is the most powerful ally of the true-hearted. Time is Truth's minister."

"That's true, my boy; I was coming to that," replied Uncle Ralph. "Let us see what time will

prove. You are going away on Friday: how soon are you coming back?"

"As soon as I possibly can."

Uncle Ralph laughed.

"I thought as much. Suppose you stay away until Christmas."

"A lifetime!" gasped Anthony.

"Only about six months; hardly long enough to prove a great love, but enough to give a holiday fancy time to dwindle into a pleasant memory."

"Not to see Madge for six months!" said Anthony. "You don't mean it."

"I do mean it," returned Uncle Ralph somewhat grimly. "If your love is of any worth, absence will only make it stronger."

"You know," he went on, "that my part of the business of books is to make them pay, if I can, and to keep my authors up to the mark. How are you getting on with that story which we hope to publish this year?"

Anthony was rather taken aback. To say the least, his progress was hardly phenomenal.

"How much have you done since you came to 'The Traveller's Joy'?" pursued Uncle Ralph.

Anthony confessed that his output was emphatically *nil.*

"That is what I thought," said Uncle Ralph. "Well, we will make allowance for holiday keeping. But how much do you think you will do if you come back here as soon as you can?"

Being truthful, Anthony thought it wiser to refrain from saying what he did think.

"Not much, I'm afraid," Uncle Ralph answered for him. "Yet you are able to do work of which any man might be proud. You have already won a fair measure of success, but I feel that you have still to give us of your best. My boy, we want that best; then do not let love interfere with your work."

"My love will make my work worthier," replied Anthony, with the conviction of a true lover.

"Let it do so, then. Go away for awhile and work hard, and don't come to see Madge until the story is finished. Make it better than anything you have yet done."

The prospect seemed less barren when put in that light. Uncle Ralph's appeal was made stronger in that Anthony's work was a very real part of his life, although he treated it lightly at times. But to wait until Christmas for a sight of Madge! To the

ardent mind of her lover that was altogether unnecessary, impossible.

"But surely there is no need to wait until Christmas. I could come and see Madge sometimes," he suggested.

"Better not—though perhaps Christmas is rather far ahead. Suppose we say until that story is finished."

"Then wouldn't there be a danger that I might be in such hurry to finish it that the work would suffer?" persisted Anthony astutely.

Uncle Ralph laughed.

"You are sharp at finding loopholes, I must say. No," he pondered, "I think you are too good an artist to be slipshod, or to let your work suffer for that reason. At the same time, there may be something in what you say. Suppose we effect a compromise and make it November 2nd."

"Why November 2nd?" asked Anthony in surprise.

"You had better ask Madge." Uncle Ralph's eyes twinkled. "Yes, November 2nd will be just the thing."

Truly the ways of a publisher are full of guile.

"I see," said Anthony, "you want to make sure of that book by the autumn."

"It would be nice to get it before Christmas."

"Bother Christmas!" interpolated Anthony.

"And there is a slight danger that you may be a little too easy-going. No man, and an artist least of all, can do his best work until he learns to take himself seriously."

"But what of Madge? Don't you think it will be hard for her?" queried Anthony.

"If her love be of worth, it will only grow stronger while you are apart; but if it is only a passing fancy, nothing will so speedily bring forgetfulness as your absence." Uncle Ralph grew stern for the moment. "But, remember, Madge is not one to love lightly."

"She will never forget," affirmed Anthony.

And from that we may gather that the faith which comes of loving was, to Anthony, no mere idle word.

"Here she comes," said Uncle Ralph, as Madge, sunny of face and light of the morning, came into the garden.

Divining something of the business that had been toward, she came rather shyly, for her, and kissed Uncle Ralph good morning, holding out her hand to Anthony.

"Give her a kiss, my boy; never mind the old man," said Uncle Ralph.

And Anthony kissed her, but somehow forgot to let her hand go.

"Well, young lady, we have been talking about you," the old gentleman went on.

Madge put her hands on his shoulders.

"You don't mind, do you?"

"Mind what?" he said, pinching her cheek ever so lightly.

"What Tony has told you—that I love him."

"The old birds must not mind when the young one finds a mate."

"But you don't mind, do you?"

"No, I'm as pleased as can be." Madge hugged him for that. "I knew my little girl would find someone before long. But don't you think that Master Anthony ought to be punished for coming to you under an assumed name? I have not forgotten Mr. Lane."

Madge took Anthony's hand, and smiled into his face.

"I really think he deserves it," she said, looking from one to the other.

It was a strangely happy moment for her.

"That is too bad," laughed Anthony. "Uncle Ralph wants to send me away until Christmas, for punishment."

"Until Christmas! Oh!" echoed Madge. "But

I haven't masqueraded under another name. Why should I be punished?"

"For having aided and abetted the offender, I think."

"You had better let me punish him, uncle."

Uncle Ralph shook his head.

"I am afraid that would only encourage him to sin again. . . . No, my boy, you had better give me your word not to turn up again until that book is finished."

"I would rather not do that," said Anthony.

"Why not?" asked the other.

"If I give you my word, I cannot break it, can I?"

"Well, well! You must think over what I have said, but remember that the old man expects his own way sometimes."

"Then you consent to our betrothal?" said Anthony.

"I will acknowledge that you are lovers—one has only to look at you to do that—but there must be no formal engagement yet. Wait awhile; time will prove. Come along, let us go into breakfast." He put his hand on Madge's shoulder. "Master Anthony will tell you afterwards what I have been saying to him; it is nothing very dreadful."

And afterwards Anthony told her.

"How can we be apart so long?" she whispered. "Uncle Ralph cannot understand."

"I think he does; and he is very anxious for me to finish the book I have started."

"Do you want to get on with it?"

"It will be my gift to you," returned Anthony simply, realising how she had come to fill his life; and Madge understood.

"Why did he say November 2nd?" asked Anthony.

"That is my birthday: I shall be twenty-one. It is four months yet. Oh, Tony, not to see you for four months!"

There were tears in her voice.

"Uncle Ralph says that absence will prove our love. I think that is why he wants me to stay away. He seems to fancy our love may be but a summer fancy that may soon pass."

"Ah!"

A light came into Madge's eyes as though she saw something shining afar. She saw love grown great and strong beyond all their present knowledge of it.

"It *shall* prove our love," she said. "We will show them how sure we are of each other, Tony."

And Anthony knew then that his banishment was certain.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH OUR TRAVELLER DEPARTS FROM THE LAND OF SUMMER.

SO it came about that on the Friday morning Anthony set forth from "The Traveller's Joy" with his knapsack upon his back, and he took the road that led southward over the hills.

He had bidden farewell to Uncle Ralph and Amy, to Becky and to James. He had taken a parting look at Whindles and its garden. It was nearly mid-July now, and the white lilies were in bloom, and the tall lupines; and the lavender, too—a whole bed of it big enough to tumble into. White jessamine upon the wall, climbing above Madge's window, flowered best where it was most loved. And now the roses were everywhere. But Anthony had to say "Good-bye" to it all, and to "The Traveller's Joy." He had wondered how soon he would sleep again in that white bedroom, with its spacious, cleanly air; its windows open to the garden where the tall hollyhocks, pink, and red as claret, came

nearly up to the sill. He had grown very fond of the homely old place.

"You'll come back, won't you, Uncle Tony?" Winnie had said.

"Come again soon, sir," William had added.

And Anthony had promised that he would.

He walked between two moods, being light-hearted enough because of the joy he carried with him, yet somewhat heavy of his going for that he must leave behind.

The road led him from the country he had learned to love; the *crunch* of the summer dust under his feet made him step out lustily. But as he looked backward the same road seemed to lead right into the heart of summer, and he smiled for what he had found there, and made the year four months older at a thought. Furthermore Madge was with him. They were to go together until midway of the hills; then she would return, alone.

They breasted the hill, and at the top they both turned—he to wave farewell to the inn, to the fields, and to the woods.

"Good-bye 'Traveller's Joy'!" waved Anthony.

"Good-bye!" echoed Madge.

'Why you?" Anthony questioned.

"My heart goes with you," said Madge wistfully. And for awhile they went silently, and very close together.

"I go to prove my love," said Anthony presently.

"I stay to prove mine," replied she.

"And I will come back to prove it when that book is finished. Do you remember how I said that I would write of the joy of life and of the beauty of the earth?"

"Could I forget?" she said.

"Why, I did not know the joy of life then, but now——" He paused.

"Now what?" Madge asked, and her eyes were shining.

"Now you are my joy of life. Now I have seen the earth through your eyes, and you have made me love it as I never did before. I see things with my heart. Ah! I will write of it *now*."

They came at last to a place where the road ran level between the hills. One could have seen the sea had it not been for a round hill crowned with beeches that loomed up at the end of the valley. This was the place of parting.

They stood awhile at a white gate, looking over a field of green wheat that was just beginning to

turn yellow; it went up the hill-slope into a scarlet stain of poppies. On the hedge the traveller's joy was in bloom. Anthony gathered some; he had learned that flower now.

"It is the symbol of what I found at Whindles," he said. And Madge understood that the things one dreams of love are less wonderful than the realities of it.

Summer was at the full, and they drank of it together. It was meet that they should part there by the white gate with the love flowers and the wheat, with the road before them both, and the larks singing high above them.

Anthony took both her hands.

"Good-bye, my beloved!"

He drew her closer and she gave him her lips. They trembled with the sorrow of parting and the joy of their passion.

"Good-bye, dear love!" she said.

"Until I come to you again, good-bye! I love you, Madge!"

"*I love you!*"

One long, steadfast look, wherein love triumphed in their eyes, and he went his way southward, while she went the other way of the road, but

slowly, and walking backwards for the most part with her face towards the sun; and many times Anthony turned to find her gazing after him thus, nor had either of them eyes for aught save each other.

Thus they went until a turn of the road took him out of sight; and though, because of him, she sang as she went homewards, it seemed to her that summer was over ere the ripening of the wheat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH TELLS STRANGE TIDINGS CONCERNING "THE TRAVELLER'S JOY," AND HOW ANTHONY FINISHED HIS BOOK.

SUMMER waxed towards fruitage, and there came days that were moveless with the wonder of it. The corn grew gold and yellow under the sun, and week by week the sun crept a little farther southward at setting time, and the bats began to roam earlier over the roadways in the dusk.

The commons were purple with the heather, and the bracken was shoulder high, and more, so that it made a cool retreat wherein one could lie hidden from the August sun.

There came the harvest, and the first apples ripened in the orchards. The harebells bloomed on the hills, and the thistle-down floated, floated, all day long—little shining wings of summer, which the breeze wafted out of sight.

That wonderful sense of bursting and abundant

life which had pervaded the air of June had passed, and instead there was a feeling of great contentment, almost of rest, in the air; it was as though the earth itself, saturated with the sun, grew ripe with the ripening of the fruit.

Madge felt something of that serenity which comes with the harvest, when summer, fulfilled of itself, seems to pause. Often the contentment of her love was greater even than her longing for Anthony. She had not lost her brightness, and her gay laughter rang as freely as before; but there was a deeper gladness in it; she had grown infinitely more womanly.

Her want of Anthony was so great, that sometimes it seemed as though she must call him to her. In some wonderful way he had grown into her life, and had become the very centre of it. She seemed wholly given up to love.

The whole country that lay about her home was, for her, full of Anthony. There was scarcely a road they had not travelled together, or a field in which they had not idled. In the woods were the paths they had trod together, leading to green hollows, or to open glades where the sunshine was a thing to marvel at. There was the river,

and the brooks that sang their way down to it; and, most unforgettable of all, there was Marple Down, keeping a steadfast vigil over the weald, however changeful the sky.

Madge climbed to the top of the Down one day, when her longing was more than she could bear at home. Little spires of agrimony, that smelled like a sweet ointment, grew where the speedwell had been, and the bryony berries hung in great tendrils from the hedges.

She looked out over the world as she and Anthony had done together; and then she knew that he had changed the face of it for her, doubling her gladness, so that even while they were apart she must needs be full of joy. Her eyes glistened as she looked down over the fields, and the thought that they would be together again made her catch her breath for sweetness of it.

The hill was a treasure-house of memories for her. Here they had sat and stood and walked together; here was the hollow where he had read to her that wonderful passage of Richard Jefferies'; the slope they had climbed together, the path that had taken them down to the road through the green evening.

Nothing was missed; she went over the familiar ground eagerly, wistfully.

After all, absence as a means of proving one's love is apt to become very wearisome when love itself requires no proof; and Madge began to discern that perhaps the little services which would be rendered when absence had become a thing of the past would be a far greater proof of loving. It was certainly a method more to her mind.

She went to "The Traveller's Joy" even more often than had been her wont, doubtless much for the same reason that she went to Marple Down, because it had a charmed atmosphere wherein memory could play at will about the form of Anthony.

To William and his good wife the situation was something of an enigma. "Why did Mr. Penrose stay away all the rest of the summer-time?" they often asked each other; but no satisfactory answer was forthcoming. They could not understand it at all.

"He can't have quarrelled with Mr. Harford, can he?" said William.

"I shouldn't think so, or Miss Madge wouldn't be so happy about it," returned his wife.

William nodded.

"She do think a lot of him."

Mrs. Hodges came round the table and put her hands affectionately on William's shoulders.

"Yes, she do think a lot of him, dear old Will," she said, looking into his face; then she drew his face down and kissed him.

"Nell," he managed to say, "Nell."

William always seemed to be just a little afraid of this bright, affectionate little woman.

"He thinks a lot of her too," she said, "I'm sure."

"That's why I thought he'd be back before this," William said, after awhile.

"I expect he will turn up one of these days," replied Mrs. Hodges.

"Aye, that he will!" said Hodges with decision, thinking of Madge.

Still they could not quite make it out, and even Becky, in her most garrulous mood and with the aid of Mr. Becky, did not enlighten them very much.

Meanwhile, what of Anthony?

He was working hard, and wondering why the latter part of summer seemed to go so much slower than the earlier part had done.

There was a great change in him, a change of which he himself was not unconscious. It was as though Madge had touched into activity the rarer qualities of a nature at once ardent and desultory. He had shed some of his lumber; and now he was surprised to find that he had such a capacity for work. He was taking himself seriously at last; he grew, and his art was strengthened.

He seemed to possess a new power, a lyric quality of expression; at times he was fairly amazed at the ease and vigour of his phrasing. Hitherto there had been something of the dilettante aoout him, but now he wrote with his whole soul in his work—a man in earnest fashioning a thing of beauty. He had found his theme, and with it the supreme joy of the artist—the joy of creation.

His tale was a tale of joy—how could it be otherwise? is your ardent lover ever a pessimist?—but into it he also wove something of his own longing. There were times when his love for Madge seemed so irresistible that he could hardly refrain from setting out to Whindles there and then. But having made it a point of honour not to try to see her until he had finished his book, he stayed. Afterwards—well, afterwards he might

not be responsible for what journeys he might take.

Meanwhile his work grew steadily towards completion. He could see the end of it, inevitable and complete, and he wrote at a white heat. He was giving of his best; and when a man does that there is something added to the sum of the world's sincerity, and, it maybe, to the sum of the world's joy.

Yet it was hard to see the days of summer slip by without a sight of Madge, and with every letter which came from her he had to screw up his resolution afresh.

"I want you, dearest," he told her in one of his letters. "This summer weather gets into my blood, it sets my pulses throbbing eagerly—for *you*. Oh, to be at Wainford now, by the river—or in it even! Oh, for a sight of Whindles and its garden! And, oh, for a sight of you, Glad-eyes! Say that you want me, dear one, and it would be so easy to come to you; say but the word, and I will forget that November is not yet."

But Madge had not loved for naught. Though her eyes grew wistful at his words, she answered:—

"I want you—oh, how I want you! There—I

have said it!—but you must not come to me yet, dear. And, Tony, if the thought that I want you makes your work harder, you must forget all about it. Forget that I want you, forget how easy it would be to come to me. I am jealous for you. Your work must not be hindered by so much as a thought of me—but, oh, Tony, don't forget to want me!"

And again she told him:—

"I am in a corner of the harvest-field. Over the other side the reapers are still busy, but here where I am sitting the sheaves are standing browny-gold in the sunlight. Oh, Tony, I wish you could see the beauty of the harvest! It is something to be shared; we should be together, you and I. Over a corner of the field there is a peep of Marple Down; that alone is enough to make me open my arms for you. Come, Tony, let me show the flowers to you—St. John's wort, ragwort, knapweed, scabious, and agrimony. There's a list of names for you; they are so beautiful. Come, let us keep harvest-tide together. But, no, I must not say 'come,' or you will be leaving your work, you dear, eager boy; and I would not have you do that, even for me."

So Anthony kept steadfastly at his work, but he did not forget to want her.

One day early in September Hodges came to

Whindles to see Uncle Ralph. Some urgent and not very pleasing business had brought him, judging by his haste and evident anxiety.

"William looked worried," remarked Madge, who had seen him go away.

"He is worried," replied Uncle Ralph. "They are going to sell 'The Traveller's Joy.'"

"Sell 'The Traveller's Joy'!" echoed Madge, as though she could scarcely believe it.

"Yes, the owner wants to get rid of it, and it is to be put up for auction at Hillingsea on October 12th."

"Whatever for?"

"The usual thing, I expect, extravagance or hard times, and the owner anxious for a little ready money. He might have mentioned it to Hodges first, old tenant that he is."

"But will it make any difference to him, uncle?"

"The new owner might want to turn him out."

"After he has been there so long?"

"Old tenant or no, he would have to pack if the man who purchases it wished to take it himself," replied Uncle Ralph with some heat.

"I am sorry. No wonder William looked so worried. I do hope the person who buys the inn will let him stay on."

"We must hope for the best."

"Why don't you buy it, uncle?"

"I buy it! Why——" Uncle Ralph pondered, as though that were worth a little consideration.

Madge followed up her advantage.

"Yes, you! Why not? You could afford it, couldn't you? It would be a safe investment. Oh, do, do! Think how pleased William would be; how pleased *I* should be."

"What do you know about safe investments?" laughed Uncle Ralph. "But it is not a bad idea. I must consider it carefully, though I am afraid they will want rather a tall price for it; but, mind, not a word to anybody, not even to William."

"Of course not, uncle. You are a dear!" she added, giving him a hug.

The next day she went to the inn, ostensibly with the purpose of cheering Mrs. Hodges a little. Certainly she was a sympathetic listener.

"It is too bad," she declared, when Mrs. Hodges had finished telling her; "but perhaps you will not have to leave the dear old place." She gave an affectionate glance round the big kitchen as she spoke.

"That's just it, there's no knowing," replied

Mrs. Hodges. "The new owner might want us to turn out."

"It would be hard to leave it, Miss Weston," added William. "'Twas my gran'father's, then my father's, and it's the only hoame I've ever known. And now I have got to love the old place, and somehow I doan't think I shall take kindly to another."

He made a weak attempt at smiling; it was a long speech for him.

"Oh, it won't be as bad as that, I am sure. You must not expect the worst. Someone very nice might buy it." Madge could not help a little significance creeping into her tone, but it was unnoticed. "I do hope you will not have to leave," she went on, "I could not bear to see a stranger here."

"Thank you, miss; you do cheer one up like," responded William, feeling that his anxiety had ebbed a little.

"She do seem to do one good," he commented after Madge had gone.

"That she does," readily assented his wife. "I only hope that things will be all right between her and Mr. Penrose. And if we do have to leave, I hope he will come again before we go."

So it happened that the one piece of general news in Anthony's next letter from Wainford was to the effect that "The Traveller's Joy" would be sold by auction on October 12th. Afterwards he learned how deeply Hodges feared the possibility of having to leave the one home he had known.

About three weeks later Madge received, instead of an expected letter from Anthony, a package containing the manuscript of his book. He asked her to give it to Uncle Ralph. "Of course," his letter suggested, "you may read it if you wish."

"If I wish!" she echoed in her thought. "I believe he only sent it to me because he wanted me to see it first." And doubtless she was right.

All that afternoon, having successfully dodged Uncle Ralph, she sat in a corner of the garden reading until her face was aglow with her eagerness.

"It is beautiful," she said, "beautiful!" as though the garden could hear.

She felt very proud and glad.

The next day she finished it. Her eyes were glistening for the tenderness of it, the yearning, the perfect close. She sat still, with her hands upon her lap, gazing far away over the fields.

"Tony, I want you!" she whispered,

Anthony had woven the longing of his own heart into his story, and in it there was the cry of a great want, which in the end became fulfilment; and as she read she knew that it was her own longing too.

She stretched out her arms to the sunlight.

"Come to me, Tony!" she said, wondering that longing could be so full of joy.

"Why cannot he come now?" she asked herself.

Her eyes fell upon the pile of manuscript.

"It is better than anything he has done," she said. "Why cannot he come?"

In a flash the question was answered.

"Oh, my love, my love, I want you!" she sang to herself as she ran into the house.

She wrote her longing.

"Come! Come! *Come!*" said her letter from beginning to end.

"Love will be the making of our author," remarked Uncle Ralph, after he had read Anthony's manuscript.

"*Our* author!" said Madge, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, though her eyes shone because of his words.

"*Your* author, then!" laughed Uncle Ralph, "if you will have a monopoly of him. That story is

the best thing he has done. He has lost none of his style, and there is a deeper human note in it. He has gained immeasurably."

Madge was satisfied.

"I am so glad you think so," she said.

"I am rather of a mind to let him off the time between now and November 2nd. What do you say? Shall I write to ask him to come and be congratulated?"

Madge laughed a little, softly.

"I do not think it matters now," she replied. "It is little more than three weeks to November."

"Then you will wait?" began Uncle Ralph; but Madge had gone.

"I cannot make her out," he acknowledged to himself. "I thought she would have fairly jumped at my suggestion. I wonder Master Anthony himself has not turned up before this; I did not expect them to brave it out."

And he shook his head at the great mystery of womankind, and of *young* womankind in particular.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH TELLS HOW "THE TRAVELLER'S JOY" CHANGED HANDS.

ANTHONY was in the throes of a portentous struggle. Having sent his story on to Madge, he could find nothing better to do than to wish to follow it as soon as maybe. His thoughts ran riot, though they all took the same direction; and now he had no work in hand wherewith to hold them in.

While he was at work he had assiduously practised the art of self-suppression; but now he had finished his book the reaction came, and somehow that self refused to be suppressed any longer. In other words, he was one great longing for Madge.

"Why should I not go to her?" he argued, his heart thumping at the mere suggestion. "I do not think Uncle Ralph would be very surprised if I turned up at Whindles to-morrow."

To-morrow! Oh, if only he could see Madge to-morrow!

"This will never do," he ejaculated. "Look here,

my son," he went on paternally, "November 2nd is your day; twenty-three more blessed days yet!" His spirit groaned.

"But I have finished my book; there is no need to waste a whole three weeks. Why cannot I go to her? Why?"

"My boy"—he adopted the paternal strain again—"there *is* no need to waste those three weeks. Think of the discipline for you; you need it sadly. Think what exceptional opportunity for you to exercise your patience. Think how good it will be to learn to curb your impulses. Remember it is a point of honour that you should not show yourself at Whindles until November 2nd."

"Umph! I believe I had forgotten that," he added antiphonally, heaving a prodigious sigh. "I suppose I must stay it out." And forthwith he began anew to make resolutions.

The post came, and there were letters for him, one with the Wainford postmark. He opened that first. It was the shortest letter he had yet received from Madge, but I am not sure that he did not consider it the best.

"Come!" it began with. "Come, Tony, I want you!" was the ending of it.

Finally, when later in the evening the rain had ceased, he went out. He had no love for the town; but there was the sea, wide and black under the night, with a star or two over it, and a salt wet wind blowing finely. As he was returning, he caught sight of a bill posted near his stopping-place. The name, "Traveller's Joy," arrested his attention. It was to the effect that on October 12th, among other properties, the desirable and well-appointed inn known as "The Traveller's Joy," etc., etc., would be sold by auction, sale to commence at half-past ten.

In his eagerness to reach Whindles again, Anthony had forgotten that the day which was to settle the fate of the inn was so near. Reading the bill, he pondered on the unpleasant event, and his mind realised more surely Hodges' anxiety.

"Poor fellow!" he thought, "it will be hard if he does have to turn out." He knew that Hodges was in a great worry about it. Madge had told him in her letters how William brooded over the possibility of having to leave the inn, and she herself was awaiting not a little anxiously the result of the sale.

Anthony read the bill through again, and began

to speculate as to what manner of man would buy it.

"It's such a jolly old place," he said with a laugh, "I have half a mind to buy it myself." Then it occurred to him, "wouldn't Madge be pleased!"

The idea was not bad, he thought, perhaps it was worth entertaining. He weighed things up in his mind, but always returned to the same point: wouldn't Madge be pleased!

With regard to the price, he put the limit at seven or eight hundred pounds. In fact, he might get it for five hundred. The inn did not do a big trade by any means, and things often went so cheaply in the country. It was not long before he decided to stay for the sale in the morning, and to go on to Whindles afterwards. True, he would have to wait so much longer for a sight of Madge; but she would understand. And if he were able to secure the inn, it would be worth while to wait.

Half-past ten and a sunny morning found him in the auction room. "The Traveller's Joy" was the first property put up. Enlarging on its attractions, its "magnificent" situation, its possibilities for increase of trade—Anthony grunted—the

auctioneer called upon the gentlemen present to bid for so desirable a property.

"Three hundred pounds," said someone by way of a start.

"Three fifty," came from the back of the room; a stout man apparently, judging by his voice, which in some way suggested flannel.

"Four hundred," hazarded Anthony.

"Four fifty," drawled a cadaverous-looking fellow, as though he would much rather someone else buy the property.

"That's a man I must keep my eye on," thought Anthony.

"Five hundred," came from the other end of the room.

There was a pause.

"Five hundred pounds, gentlemen." The auctioneer warmed to his work.

"Five hundred and fifty," said Anthony, with a feeling that all eyes were upon him.

"Is *he* going into the trade?" a bottle-nosed publican whispered audibly to his fellow, in a tone which indicated that the "trade" was indeed coming to a pretty pass if such were the case.

"Six hundred," the lean fellow drawled.

"Six twenty-five."

"Six fifty." Anthony began to enjoy it.

"Six seventy-five," the tall man again, but with less drawl this time.

"Seven hundred," Anthony called.

"Seven twenty-five."

The tall man missed a turn.

"Seven seventy-five."

The man at the end of the room thought he had it.

"Going at seven hundred and seventy-five pounds," began the auctioneer again; "the only free house in the neighbourhood."

"It won't be free long if I get hold of it," said the man at the end. He was a brewer's agent.

"Eight hundred," said Anthony.

He was not going to let that brewer's agent have it if possible.

"Eight twenty-five."

The tall man's drawl had gone now.

"French gets it," someone remarked audibly.

"Eight twenty-five," began the auctioneer again.

"Eight fifty."

Still Anthony was game. He had forgotten his limit altogether.

"Eight seventy-five," the stout agent called. It was his last effort.

"Nine hundred," called Anthony and French together.

French smiled, and hazarded "Nine twenty-five." He had passed his limit.

Anthony looked round. He would try once more.

"Nine fifty," he said in his biggest voice.

French was silent.

"Going at nine hundred and fifty pounds, gentlemen," shouted the auctioneer. "Any advance on nine hundred and fifty?"

French, the tall and lean, shook his head dismally.

"Going at nine hundred and fifty." There was a pause. "Going, going"—the hammer came down with a bang—"Gone!" and Anthony found himself the possessor of "The Traveller's Joy."

It was just after noon when Anthony started from Hillingsea, with his face set northward.

Fresh from the west the autumn wind blew, with a sea smell in it, and before it the clouds came swinging up, foam-white against the sky.

Anthony walked with a lilt, keeping time to the eagerness in his blood. It was good to be alive upon such a day, and his heart carolled things

which could not be uttered. It was the morning of the day of his joy, although the clocks said that noon had passed a full hour ago, for the thrill of morning, of awakening, of living, pulsed in him. It was but the beginning of the day o delight, the day of seeing again, the day of fulfilment of longing.

He had taken a path over the downs, which would drop into the main road beyond Lychcombe. Exultant he trod the turf; expectant, for the day was full of promise. Very fast he walked, yet never fast enough, it seemed to him.

The beeches, green when he had passed that way before, were now a flame upon the hillside. Where the sunlight filtered through them they held the fire of summer in their leaves, the pomp and glory of the year in marvellous lights of red and brown. And over them the sky was very blue and very white. A robin sang, shrill and clear, above the pathway; but not for any song would Anthony linger. And at last he gained the edge of the hills, and before him and below him, field beyond field, wood beyond wood, to the limit of sight, lay the country of unforgettable summer.

"At last!" he said, shading his eyes to catch

sight of the roof of "The Traveller's Joy," a long way ahead, as it seemed, upon the road. Then his eyes sought farther afield, roaming over the brown woods, the familiar fields, the purple pines.

"*She* is there!" he said to himself, and it seemed as though summer had come back for a day, so golden was the afternoon under the westering sun.

He began to go down the hillside.

"I am coming back to mine own this time," he said to himself with a thrill of delight, thinking of "The Traveller's Joy." Indeed, he felt that he was coming home.

CHAPTER XX.

WHICH TELLS HOW OUR TRAVELLER CAME BACK TO HIS JOY.

"GOOD-DAY, William! You haven't been to the sale, then?" was Uncle Ralph's greeting. He had come over from Whindles to the inn during the afternoon, and Madge was with him.

William shook his head sadly.

"No, sir; I couldn't bear to see the old place sold. Were you able to buy it?" he asked anxiously —for Uncle Ralph had told him that he was going to make a bid for it—"or haven't you heard yet?"

"Yes, I have heard. French looked in as he came back and told me. They ran it up beyond my limit, and some stranger got it. Confound him!"

William's last hope vanished. He gave a look of mute appeal round the old place.

"I am very sorry, William," added Uncle Ralph, as they went inside.

"Mr. Harford says some stranger got it," William

said in a hopeless tone, in answer to his wife's eager question.

"Never mind!" put in Madge. "He may make a good landlord, if he is a stranger."

William shook his head.

"I 'd rather it 'ud been you, Mr. Harford."

"So would I, William, so would I; but we must hope for the best."

"And expect it too!" said Madge cheerfully.

"I am pleased you 've come," said Winnie presently, sidling up to Madge and giving her a hug. "Take me out. Yes, do!" she added, when Madge shook her head. And Madge found herself tugged into the road and across to the oak gate that opened into the meadows.

"Jump me over!" demanded Winnie.

"Oh, I can't."

"Yes, you can; *please*," beseeched Winnie, "like Uncle Tony did."

Madge thought it worth trying. She took Winnie under the shoulders and, being strong, lifted her over in fine style.

"That 's right," laughed Winnie from the other side of the gate. "Now back again!"

And back again it had to be.

Madge stood looking over the gate. Here and there an oak stood green among the reddening woods; the plane trees and the poplars, with their dancing leaves, were yellow as a ripe quince, and behind them the sun was dropping. The hedges were red with spindle-berries and maple; purple with the dregs of summer, brown and russet and green all at once. She saw it all, but with her eyes only; her mind was otherwhere. This was the day that should bring Anthony to her; perhaps even now he was coming across the hills. Her heart throbbed with a sudden sweetness of expectation. Instinctively her eyes sought the roadway, and she saw one coming—Anthony himself, walking as though he had just set out to conquer the world.

She gave a low cry of joy, and stood for a moment wondering, her hand upon her breast. Then she ran to meet him, calling his name—"Tony! Tony!"

Winnie had caught sight of him too.

"Uncle Tony!" she cried, then went dancing into the inn. "Uncle Tony! Here's Uncle Tony come back, daddy!" Her voice was shrill with excitement.

"Bless my soul!" Uncle Ralph ejaculated, going to the door.

But he waited there.

Anthony had seen Madge as soon as she had turned away from the gate, and, with a shout that rang down the road, he too ran until he gathered her into his arms. For a moment there were no words for their joy, but their lips met, there being none at hand to see; and they knew that the need of their hearts was satisfied.

"Oh, my dear love, I have wanted you!" Madge whispered.

"And I have been all one great want for you."

Then they laughed a low, inarticulate thrill of contentment for what they saw in each other's eyes; it was not unlike the croon of a mother over her child.

"So you could not forget!" he said.

"Forget! I?" There was a whole world of love in her tone and in her eyes. "Could you forget?"

For answer Anthony must needs kiss her upon the mouth. Then they went together, hand in hand, towards the inn.

"Oh, is it not all beautiful?" she said, loving the fields with her eyes.

"It *is* beautiful," he agreed. "And the inn, too—I feel as if I owned it all."

"I wonder what William would say to that?" said Madge. Her mouth was laughing for very happiness.

"I wonder," returned Anthony with commendable reserve.

They were all waiting at the door of the inn to give Anthony welcome—Uncle Ralph, William and his wife, Winnie, and even Nellie, who had not been to school that day.

"Uncle Tony! Uncle Tony!" Winnie screamed delightedly, while Mrs. Hodges in less boisterous fashion and William with a huge grasp of the hand told how pleased they were to see Anthony back again.

"Well, young man, what brings you here?" was Uncle Ralph's bluff greeting.

Anthony looked at Madge, as though the answer was quite obvious.

"I came because I was wanted here," he said, as Madge slipped her hand in his; and they stood for all the world like two children surprised in the middle of some jolly game.

"Humph! Not because you wanted to come, I suppose?"

Anthony laughed at that.

"Perhaps you will say it wasn't your own inclination that brought you here," went on the old gentleman.

"It wasn't," Anthony asserted. Even Madge looked surprised at that. "You see, if I had followed my inclination it would have brought me back again three months ago," Anthony explained.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Uncle Ralph. "I shouldn't have been surprised to see you. I did not think you would stay away as long as I said."

"I wish I had known that," Anthony commented inwardly.

"Oh, uncle, why didn't you tell *me* that?" said Madge.

"What need was there? Why, when I suggested that we should ask Anthony to come to be congratulated, you said it did not matter."

Uncle Ralph's eyes twinkled as they sought Anthony's.

"You see, I had already told him to come," returned Madge serenely.

Uncle Ralph thought there was not so much mystery about womankind after all—when you know them.

"But I don't think this is the 2nd of November," he remarked, turning to Anthony.

"I must have made a mistake in the month," suggested Anthony, unabashed.

"Well, well, my boy, it is a slight error after all, and I am right glad to see you."

"Won't you come inside, sir?" asked William.

"That I will," replied Anthony.

"It is good to come back to the old place again," he said, seating himself first on the kitchen table and then in the chimney-corner, with Madge opposite him that she might see him better.

"That 's right, Mr. Penrose, make yourself at home," said Mrs. Hodges, "you may not have the chance many more times."

"You knew the old place was to be sold, sir?" added William.

"Yes, I did, and I was very sorry. When is the sale to take place?"

"It was sold this morning, sir," said William in a dull tone.

"Do you know who bought it?" Anthony inquired, intent on a little make-believe, yet not forgetting the pleasure he had in store for them.

"Some infernal meddlesome stranger, who

couldn't keep his hands off!" Uncle Ralph burst in with so much heat that Anthony was fairly astonished.

"It is a good thing he isn't here," he laughed, "he might hear something unpleasant."

"That's very likely, if I had the opportunity to talk to him," returned Uncle Ralph with no indecision.

"But he may be a very nice person indeed," suggested Madge. "You should not be too hasty, uncle."

"Yes, perhaps he is a very decent fellow after all," said Anthony, taking up the cue. "You may be delighted to make his acquaintance one of these days."

"Not I!" fumed Uncle Ralph. "Ten to one he is a speculator, or a fellow who has managed to save a little and wants to go into the trade, and will turn the old place into a howling Noah's Ark before he has finished."

"Paint the outside a livid green, and put in modern windows, and call it 'The New Inn,'" added Anthony, by way of putting oil on the fire. "You are very hard on the poor fellow."

"Poor, indeed! Poor enough to run the price up beyond my limit," said Uncle Ralph.

"Your limit?"

"Yes, I had set my heart on buying the place myself, and commissioned a man named French to get it for me; but this infernal, this—this—stranger ran it up too high. I am as annoyed as can be."

"I should think so," agreed Anthony. "It is funny about French, though," he thought, "I was so keen on beating him, too."

"Still, he may turn out to be a decent fellow yet," he added aloud.

"It is a comfort to know he has paid about a hundred pounds more than he need have done."

"Oh, uncle!" chided Madge.

Anthony failed to derive much comfort from the fact.

"How was that?" he asked.

"If it had not been for that fellow, French might have got the place for about eight hundred or eight hundred and fifty. Nine hundred pounds was my limit, but the stranger ran it up to nine fifty."

And Uncle Ralph looked positively happy for a moment, while Anthony began to wonder if the laugh was so entirely on his side as he had imagined.

"But enough of this; talking won't alter the case," Uncle Ralph went on.

"No, that it will not. Suppose we change the subject," suggested Anthony. "I have to ask your pardon for making use of your name."

"Oh! What have you been doing?" Uncle Ralph looked up under his brows. "Nothing foolish I hope."

"I had a little business to transact in Hillingsea as I came through, and being in want of a reference, gave your name."

"For want of a better, I suppose," laughed Uncle Ralph. "I hope the business was satisfactory."

"Yes, thanks; only I am afraid I was rather dished over it."

"Umph! You authors never make good business men. You should have dished the other party."

"I rather think I did. We were both dished. I have just learned that I paid nine hundred and fifty pounds for what the other party wanted and might have got for eight hundred and fifty, but he did not get it at all."

"Eh, what? *You* paid nine hundred and fifty. You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do," interrupted Anthony, "I have bought 'The Traveller's Joy.'"

There was a moment's pause, in which Anthony looked from Uncle Ralph to Madge with a smile of triumph.

"You young scamp!" exclaimed the old gentleman.

"You 'infernal meddlesome stranger,'" suggested the other.

Madge danced round Anthony.

"It was *you* then! Oh, Tony, I am glad."

"I am as pleased as if I had got it myself," added Uncle Ralph. "William, William!" he called, "this is the infernal stranger who bought the inn. What do you think of that?"

"You, sir!" said Mrs. Hodges.

"You!" echoed William, who clearly did not know what to think of it, save that a great load which he had carried in his heart for many days past was suddenly gone.

"You will feel safe enough now, William," said Uncle Ralph. "Unless," he added to Anthony, "you are going to forsake literature for a less arduous calling."

Anthony laughed.

"No, I shall not turn you out, Mr. Hodges, I can assure you," he said, holding his hand out to William.

"Thank you, sir." There was a tremor of gratitude in William's big gruff voice as he grasped Anthony's hand.

Winnie did not quite know what it was all about, but she felt that something very satisfactory was happening; and, catching the infection of gladness, she clapped her hands, and skipped and frolicked with Madge, making an amazing to-do for so small a person.

"Oh, Mr. Penrose, 'tis such a load off our minds, we can never thank you enough," said Mrs. Hodges, and positively there were tears in the cheery little woman's eyes.

Anthony thought there must be something greatly worth having about home to make one love it like that.

"Yes, you can, Mrs. Hodges," he laughed. "I have walked a long way, and am very hungry; you may give me some tea. Let us have it together here, like we did once before, only with Mr. Harford instead of Miss Amy," he went on.

"Yes, that will be jolly," Madge chimed in. "And wouldn't Amy like to be here now!"

"I suppose I shall do as well?" said Uncle Ralph. "I am a jolly old boy sometimes."

"Yes," laughed Anthony, "we could not do without the 'other party.' Let us celebrate the event of the day by an honourable feast."

Mrs. Hodges began forthwith to prepare the table.

"Come!" Anthony whispered to Madge, indicating the glowing twilight that lay without the door, and together they stole into the garden.

The sun had gone. But from the west high splashes of cloud, that showed for wind, trailed a lingering rose across the deepening sky into the purple east. The air was full of windy light, and the earth glowed with the wonder of it.

To Madge and Anthony the evening was too wonderful for words, they could only go silently and very close together, filled with a content that seemed without measure. About them was the sweetness of moist earth and fallen leaves, as fragrant as trampled bracken; the faint smell of distant woods, and the strong sweetness of gathered apples.

When they looked into each other's faces, the glory from without, the glow and colour of the fading day, mingled with the glory of the light within, and their eyes shone with a great transfiguring joy.

Then Anthony drew her head back and kissed her where the light of her face was consummated in the red of her lips.

"O my love, my joy!" he whispered.

She hung upon his caress and gave him kiss for kiss. Not greater than her own could be his joy. "*My Beloved!*" she called him.

They looked over the garden and upon the chimneys and roof of the inn. One half was stained with deep colour, the patches of yellow lichen gleamed and the red tiles grew ruddier; the other half was in shadow, vaguely silvered.

"Is it not perfect?" said Anthony, sniffing the pungent smell of the wood fire.

"I am so glad you have bought it, Tony, not only for William's sake. What made you think to do it?"

"Nothing but an impulse; I thought you would be pleased."

"You bought it because I would be pleased? Was that all?"

"Was that not enough?" asked Anthony.

"Oh, Tony!"

"Then you are pleased?" he persisted.

But there are no words for Madge's reply.

A homely light shone out from the window—a golden beam that seemed very straight and small and warm in the dusk.

Winnie came to the door.

"Tea's ready, Uncle Tony," she piped.

"How glad you must be, dearest, to know that 'The Traveller's Joy' is all your own," said Madge as they went towards the kitchen.

"Yes, I have wanted *her* all the summer long," replied Anthony, and he kissed her upon the lips.

And so our Traveller came back to his Joy.

THE END.

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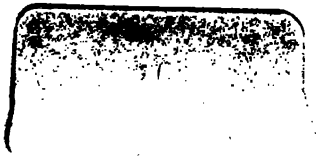
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